



ISAAC FOOT





BOSWELL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

WORKS ON
DR. JOHNSON & BOSWELL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- I. THE LIFE OF DR. JOHNSON.
A reprint of the First Edition, with the later alterations supplied. (There have been three issues of this Edition.) In three vols.
- II. THE LIFE OF JAMES BOSWELL.
With original Letters and Papers. In two vols.
- III. BOSWELL AND CROKER'S BOSWELL. A Review of Mr. Croker's Edition.
- IV. A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF DR. BIRKBECK HILL'S JOHNSONIAN EDITIONS.
- V. BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON.
Popular Edition. With new Notes, etc. In one vol.



JAMES BOSWELL.

From the statue by Percy Fitzgerald in Lichfield Market-place.

BOSWELL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF JAMES BOSWELL," ETC.



LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS

MDCCCXII

BM

1912

PREFACE

THE origin of this somewhat elaborate treatise is to be found in an article of mine that appeared in a recent number of the *Quarterly Review*, in which the topics here more fully dealt with were briefly shadowed forth. The theory is a novel one, and many may think it far-fetched or fantastic; but it was long ago hinted at by Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Croker, no mean authorities. One thing, indeed, I look back upon with regret and some pain—that I was compelled by the argument to say harsh and perhaps ill-natured things of the worthy and ever-entertaining Bozzy, whose champion and commentator I have been from my earliest youth; for no one has been so devoted an admirer as I have been. But it was absolutely necessary, in order to make out the case, that his exuberance, lack of restraint and of decent conduct, should be set forth in plain terms—which, being related by himself, thus show his purpose, at all hazards, of claiming the first place in his chronicle.

The objection, I know, will be made that this “jaundiced” view is inconsistent with the devoted

affection, the almost idolatry for the Sage, with which his work teems. These expressions, however, were portions of his daily record written down at the moment; and when he came to arrange his materials for publication he merely allowed them to stand as representing a contemporaneous estimate—though, as I have clearly shown, these feelings of love and admiration had then much cooled, and had given place to actual resentment.

The “motor forces” so often alluded to betoken the various forms of exuberance which exerted a sort of pressure on Boswell’s ebullient disposition. He thus brought all his varied powers to the enforcement of his one great aim and end—viz., the assertion of his supremacy.

The list of the author’s writings shows that he at least deserves the credit of industry in his Johnsonian studies, which have been pursued for a period of at least fifty years. So I hope I may claim some credit for these contributions to what the great Sage has called “the public stock of harmless pleasure,” without being thought boastful or egotistic.

The six “caricatures”—a selection from about a dozen others equally ludicrous—will be found interesting, as well as a novelty, and show the coarse, unsparing ridicule with which Boswell and his Tour were pursued. They have always been ascribed to Rowlandson, and are somewhat in

his manner; but Henry Angelo in his *Memoirs* declares that they were the work of another. My friend Sir Sidney Colvin, however, who is a museum of learning in such matters, has been good enough to give me his opinion on the point. He says that these plates were designed by Samuel Collings, but that their execution or etching was the work of Rowlandson. He tells me also that they were issued in a volume containing a large number of others, with the title "Picturesque Beauties of Boswell"—altogether a truly mortifying bit of ridicule.

It will be said, Why give such profuse quotations from a book that is in everybody's hand, and that so many know almost by heart? Because I think it will conduce to a better knowledge of this wonderful chronicle if the details of its merit are pointed out; and of the latent humour, powers of description, expressions of feeling—in short,

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,"

which from familiarity would escape notice—should be emphasized. From familiarity, and a wish to follow the strict narrative, we are apt to pass such things by. The incomparable Jane Austen is read again and again by her admirers, but few of them suspect what a storehouse of genuine wit, latent suggestions, and sagacious touches of character are there enshrined. So, too, scarcely any would

suspect that in the *Life of Johnson* is found one single saying which embodies the whole principle and philosophy of acting.

Again, it was only by multiplied instances that I could hope to prove the truth of the theory I was advocating. Boswell's self-advertisement, to the exclusion of all competitors, would show clearly that he was intended for the central figure. And, finally, it is a welcome thing to find our favourite passages thus exhibited in the form of detached "scenes," with much of the connecting verbiage omitted.

Two illustrations are given at the beginning of the volume, representing statues of Johnson and his follower, recently set up in London and Lichfield respectively. I hope I may be pardoned for saying that it is a unique thing that these works should have been fashioned by the same hand that wrote this book and other Johnsonian lives and commentaries.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BOSWELL'S CHARACTER ANALYZED	1
II. FIRST MOTOR FORCE—STRONG RELIGIOUS FEELING	41
III. SECOND MOTOR FORCE—LEVELLING DOWN JOHNSON	62
IV. THIRD MOTOR FORCE—ANIMOSITIES	79
V. FOURTH MOTOR FORCE—WEIN UND WEIB	168
VI. FIFTH MOTOR FORCE—HUMOUR	175
VII. SIXTH MOTOR FORCE—"REPORTING"	212
VIII. SEVENTH MOTOR FORCE—FINAL QUARREL	236
IX. EIGHTH MOTOR FORCE—JOHNSON ASSAILED	264
X. L'ENVOI	279

ILLUSTRATIONS

JAMES BOSWELL	<i>Frontispiece</i>
DR. JOHNSON	<i>To face page</i> 1
THE JOURNALIST, WITH A VIEW OF AUCHINLECK	52
A BREAKFAST CONVERSATION	96
SETTING OUT FROM EDINBURGH	100
WALKING UP THE HIGH STREET, EDINBURGH	126
TEA	158
WIT AND WISDOM	200



DOCTOR JOHNSON.

From the Statue by Percy Fitzgerald in St. Clement Danes Churchyard.

BOSWELL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

BOSWELL'S CHARACTER ANALYZED

✓ MR. CROKER, the first and the most useful of Boswell's commentators, once let fall a pregnant hint as to what might be done in a novel direction. Johnson's talk and Boswell's talk, Johnson's life and doings, with Boswell's obsequious attendance, had long engrossed attention. Could it be, he asked, that, after all, we had before us a disguised life of Boswell himself? His character was a strange one, not without artfulness. He was an adept at "laying traps." He was full of a ludicrous vanity, which led him into sad exhibitions, of the absurdity of which he was quite unconscious. With all due regard for his genuine attachment to the great Doctor, there can be little doubt that his vanity, with the pride of being talked of and pointed out as the follower of so great a being, was mainly accountable for his steady twenty years' attendance and drudgery. With a consciousness that his friends were laughing at him, he felt all

the time that he was really wiser than they—and longed to earn the reputation of a solid, capable man, full of a prodigious faith and constancy, which was more than justified by the event. He would take care that the world should do him justice.

Was not this an extraordinarily clever and original scheme, carefully planned? Round Johnson were grouped all the distinguished literary and political men of the day. Boszy managed to become known, not merely as the intimate of a great man, but as occupying the exceptional office of personal attendant, without whom the Doctor would not present himself; much as a Bishop takes his chaplain, or a Minister his secretary. This gave him a fixed public position. The Tour, we may be convinced, was intended as a regular public advertisement, which was to herald Mr. Boswell and his friend all over the kingdom—and so it did, and so it does still.

So cleverly and so perseveringly has he carried out his system that it is impossible to lay down the volumes without the conviction that there has been with us a very interesting, capable man—one of great ability and general attraction, quite fitted to hold his own with the eminent man he describes. And what more particularly fortifies the theory is that the “Life of Johnson” is, for three-quarters of its extent, made up of minutely reported conversations, which, after all, are mere illustrations of

character, not incidents. The remaining fourth was compiled from the many short Lives that had already appeared. These additional matters Boswell furnishes in a rather dry, austere fashion ; but when he himself comes on the stage, all is vivacity and colour. He moves to and fro with spirit and animation. The contrast is extraordinary between the cold, laboured periods of the official record and the gay, rattling business that sets in when the chief actors enter on the scene.

And let any skilled reader ask himself the simple question : Could not a full and satisfactory account of the details of Boswell's life, his proceedings, character, tastes, and follies, be supplied from the *Life*? There can be no doubt as to the answer. Even where there is no direct statement, or where the matter is slurred over, we can infer the truth from innumerable passages. If such is the case, it is a fair presumption that our author intended to furnish a complete and favourable account of himself. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he has told as much of himself as he has of his friend, if not more. We learn all about his ancient family and its long descent—his father, wife, children, brothers, cousins ; how he came to choose a profession and change it ; his travels ; his religion ; his feelings, sufferings, weaknesses, absurdities—all these topics being introduced, in an easy, natural way, into talks with his friend. For,

if the great man were interested, so might be the reader. He tells us of every distinguished person that he knew; hardly one is omitted. None of the elements supplied in an autobiography are wanting. In the intervals of his chronicles he tells us what he has himself done, with his various adventures in love and travel. Every book or pamphlet that he wrote is described, with every book that he intended to write; and he unfolds to us all his hatreds and dislikes in the most unrestrained fashion.

Again, as to the jeers and rough rallying of his friends, what if his opportunity were to come on later, and the world were to learn what manner of man he really was, how much he had seen and had written, and how he could hold his part in talk and debate? A time might come, too, when he could pay off all scores. In his book he would be able to silence ribald scoffers. All through he would make his august friend vouch for his character and morals, and for his orthodox views. He would show how that friend could be tolerant and indulgent to common failings; nay, he would prove that the Sage himself had fallen like other men. Johnson's example was, indeed, to be his vindication; indirectly he should be used to save his biographer's moral character, seriously damaged by his notorious laxity of life—to which he imparted a sort of Tartuffe complexion by his

ostentatious professions of religion. Boswell brings the subject up again and again, and, knowing that Johnson had himself to war vigorously against the flesh, artfully contrives to take him on this side, and thus secure his great authority.

And was he not appointed supernaturally, as it were, to take charge of the Doctor, not only during life, but even after his death? He was to search into, adjudicate on, reward and punish all who had failed in their duty or respect to him—Boswell—who had been appointed guardian of all the Sage's interests during life or death. He was to watch over, regulate, and bring to judgment all flippant speakers and doers, together with those who had shown irreverence to him, the viceroy over Johnson. As this was a sacred delegation, he would show no mercy to anyone, he would soften nothing, be most strict in his judgment, pass over nothing. He consciously held to this as a matter of faith. Hence his severity towards women as well as men who did not recognize *his*, the great Boswell's, position. His rage when Hawkins called him simply "Mr. Boswell," without any compliment or other description, was due, not to affronted personal vanity, but to an offensive non-recognition of his high position. I am convinced that any other interpretation of his dislikes would be erroneous. It would be quite inconsistent with his undisturbed good-humour — his forgiveness and amiability.

The assumption that Johnson would welcome all these details with gratitude is exquisitely ludicrous, and it shows how dense was Bozzy's feeling.

How strange a thing is this! All the time that he was toiling at the oar, while affecting to portray his great chief, he was carefully preparing—laying up stores of material for his own exaltation, setting himself forward, telling all about himself, his family, his friends, his own sayings and doings and writings; in fact, putting before the reader a perfect picture of "James Boswell, of Auchinleck, Esquire"; making him a living, moving image, second only to that of the great man himself.

On careful examination, it will be seen that almost from the first day Boswell set himself to be "viceroy" over Johnson. The journey to the Hebrides was the first step. Why was Bozzy so eager to carry out this plan, harping on it, forcing it on Johnson where he could? Simply because it confirmed him in his office before the public. It put him in evidence. Then came the small subsidiary journeys and visits in company with the great man, with "assiduous attendance" on him. It was amazing that the aide-de-camp was not formally installed in Johnson's household, but it will be remembered that a room was actually given him, lodging but no board, though the experiment lasted only for a short time. It can be shown, indeed, that the Doctor made occasional efforts to

free himself from his servitude, but the stolid insensibility and good-humour of the henchman frustrated all such attempts. What if into the texture of his book Boswell could contrive to infuse a sort of *apologia* for himself and for his whole life, and thus prove that he was not unworthy of his great friend? What if, while professedly delineating the Doctor, he should make himself loom yet larger; and, while affecting to remain in the background, set forth his own life and career, show what his own character was, and how deeply respected was that character by Johnson? He has really done all this, and, in an exceedingly adroit and artful way, has made Johnson his advocate and defender.

But we may go yet deeper, and reach a more curious development. Not content with giving these incidental accounts of himself and his doings, Boswell had an ambition to register his own views and speculations, even ramblings, on many things. For he was an imaginative thinker, a highly romantic being, full of dreamings. These views and comments of his are interesting. It is clear that he put them down, not for show, but simply because they were pet theories and hobbies, and he wished that others should relish them also. Some were of a transcendental kind. The whole mixture of Bozzy and his thoughts, fancies, and erratic doings, makes up a curious mingle-mangle,

which almost puts him on a level with the great man himself.

We know what trouble Boswell had in devising a descriptive title for his book, especially with the awkward words "Comprehending an Account," etc., which exercised him much. It will be noticed that it is a rather limited title, and carefully specifies what he considered was sufficient for a Life. He seems to rest chiefly on the report of the conversations, as he figured in them so largely.

But a more accurate and faithful descriptive title might be found that would summarize all the topics that were dealt with. Such would be—

THE
LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON,
WITH A
FULL ACCOUNT OF HIS VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS,
TAKEN DOWN BY THE EDITOR.

Containing also a Complete Autobiography of James Boswell, Esq., with a Full Account of his Family, Ancestors, Relations; his Adventures Abroad and at Home; his Career at the Bars of England and Scotland, with an Account of Various Cases in which he was concerned; a Description of his Friends, Acquaintances, and Enemies, with all their Characters, Faults, and Frailties; his Love Passages; his Disputes and Enmities; his Excesses in Wine; his Religious Opinions, Pious Utterances, Sermons, etc.; with a List of his Writings, including both those proposed and those already written; and also his Revisions and Corrections of the Doctor's Opinions and Criticisms; with, finally, an Account of the Editor's Opinions and Speculations on Many Subjects.

Who could suppose that he would embark on a life of such servitude, with the almost utopian view of sitting at Johnson's feet and drinking in wisdom from those sagacious lips, unless he had some important personal aim in view? This aim, it may be contended, was his own advancement and self-exaltation; to be shown forth to the great public as a distinguished literary man, or at least as one of the august circle, the friend of Johnson's friends. He was not as yet capable of writing an important work, but he should be admitted to the ranks of the arbiters, classed with Goldsmith, Langton, Percy, and the rest. Almost at once, after the introduction, he began his system of recording Johnson, taking down all he said, "sticking close to him"—notes destined to form the basis of the great Life and general record of the literary world of his time. That Life, which at last he saw that he alone could furnish, should, he dared whisper to himself, be also his own memorial.

Now, this view has been wholly overlooked—the personal, perhaps selfish, view—but it is the only probable one. It is absurd to think that a sensualist such as Boswell was could really hunger and pine for the society of a social moralist like Johnson. In fashionable society he had no hope of being important, but as the obsequious friend, follower, and worshipper of the great literary giant, they might gradually admit him to their fellowship.

It is surprising how deftly Boswell contrives to make his own personality—his thoughts, feelings, and animosities—pervade his book from beginning to end. It is a unique thing to find a biographer assailing his enemies persistently from the first page to the very last, as he does in the case of Hawkins.*

Eager as he was to win celebrity, even to the making himself, as he did so, expend the best portion of his life in a long, assiduous drudgery as the "follower" of the "grand old Samuel"—who, like Mr. Pickwick, had his train of "followers," members of *his* club—it seemed hard that in the late days of his full celebrity no one should have given him credit for what he most sought—a character on a level with that of his associates. For to the present moment, during the hundred and ten years or so

* Not less curious is the ingenious fashion in which he contrives to make his own share in any incident as conspicuous and creditable as possible. Witness the painful and indiscreet transaction of the application for an increase to Johnson's pension, which cast a cloud over the great man's closing days. Here Boszy holds himself as the hero, carefully veiling his own clumsy and unbecoming intrusion into a matter that did not concern him, with the result of bringing Johnson into a most humiliating situation. Boswell, as we know, actually took on himself, without Johnson's knowledge, to represent to the Court that his friend was in a distressed position and without money, whereas he knew that Johnson had plenty saved, and could afford to lend to his friends. It is an awkward incident in the Sage's life that, when he came to know of the matter, he did not at once indignantly repudiate the statement, but acquiesced in it.

of his popularity, he has only been accepted as a chronicler or reporter of talks, or "follower" of the great man.

All the commentators, the Crokers and Birkbeck Hills, have agreed that elucidating notes, by way of correction or illumination, should form the attraction of the "show." They have worked like the old scholiasts, and furnished "variorum" editions. But all the time, who of them dreamed that they were treating, not so much Dr. Johnson's life (at most a subsidiary matter), as *The Life and Times and Vindication of James Boswell, Esquire, of Auchinleck*—his thoughts and sayings; his doings here, there, and everywhere; his direction and correction of his master; his complete leadership; his toleration of insult, in order to set himself right before the reader, and show how patiently he had borne it, and, at the close, that the great moralist had grievously erred in decency and restraint? Mr. Croker, indeed, in a shadowy way had given a hint that there might be a new and interesting course of inquiry in this direction—as interesting, almost, as that concerning Johnson himself. And there can be no doubt that this alone would shed light on the many perplexing things in the book and its scheme. This is certain, and it will be admitted, after perusal of the following pages, that here we have Boswell writing, by the aid of Johnson, not so much Johnson's life as Boswell's.

Mr. Croker adds to his speculation, that there is reason to believe that Boswell's mind was a little unhinged, his malady being disguised under that of hypochondria; this, too, was the belief among some of his contemporaries. But this may be going too far. Even the very extent of Bozzy's personal lucubrations, if contrasted with those concerning his chief, will be found more profuse and personal than those of his friend and mentor.

But there is a still higher interest. Where can such a picture of a mind with its "anfractuosities," as Johnson called them, be found anywhere, or such an entertaining picture of motives—often revealed in a ludicrously transparent fashion? And these revelations we owe to a remarkable gift in the author; for he possessed one valuable quality without which his great work would have been an impossibility, and that was courage, or candour, or recklessness—foolhardiness, as some would call it. It was a sheer indifference to consequences, which left him quite careless as to what anyone felt or thought about him. Very likely it was ignorance, just as the old salt said of the Cockney rowers, "They fears nothing because they knows nothing." A stranger thing was, that no severe lesson seemed to open his eyes or give him caution. A truly mysterious character!

It is in the details and general current of the narrative that we find this assertive personality

of Boswell persistently revealed. At every turn he settles, limits, or utters censures; if there are any opinions not acceptable to him, it seems to be forced upon him to lay down that he cannot approve, or that he does so only partially. Such declaration he will supplement with his own view of the matter. He is constantly using such phrases as "I am inclined to think," "I believe the true view," etc. But he most loves to lay before us his feelings of happiness and enjoyment, and how he is affected by most things; and certainly we would not willingly spare any of these engaging reflections, for they are natural and truly affecting or romantic. But is this the function of a biographer, when he sits down to write a full and elaborate account of some distinguished man? Such a writer gathers all the facts, the letters from and to his subject, recounts his movements, the events in which he took part. He studiously stands aside, or at the most reports something of importance in which he had a necessary share, his own portion being used merely to make clearer the part taken by the principal, for the book is about him exclusively.

There is one trifling matter which might escape notice, which seems the most significant proof of all of our author's fixed purpose to omit nothing which shall make him important in his readers' eyes. Could we conceive in our day an official

biographer, busy with the life of one of the greatest luminaries of his age, suddenly stopping to inform the reader that at such a time he himself was about to be married, and that he was moved to write a little comic epigram on the event—doggerel, in fact? Suppose he further explained that he had shown it to a manager, who had it set to music; and also to the subject of the biography, who made one remark upon it? Yet all this is exactly what Boswell did, for when he was about to be married he submitted to his great friend a little “matrimonial thought” which he had written *à propos* of the event, but which has nothing whatever to do with his narrative:

“ In the blithe days of honeymoon,
 With Kate's allurements smitten,
 I loved her late, I loved her soon,
 And called her ‘dearest kitten.’
 But now my kitten's grown a cat,
 And cross like other wives;
 Oh, by my soul! my honest Matt,
 I fear she has nine lives!”

But he never could resist the vanity of thus advertising himself: the sole connection of Johnson with the matter being a casual “Sir, you should not swear!” Now, did we in a modern book come upon a passage of this kind, we should consider the author to be mad or foolish. Yet this represents the whole general tone of his work, which often has as little reference to Johnson as the verses

just quoted. But all the same he was entitled to set them down in a work which he looked on as his own autobiography—the *only* title on which he had a right to introduce them.

Nor must it be supposed that Bozzy had any formal purpose or design of *writing* a biography of himself as such. He was shrewd enough to see that his attitude would reveal itself. “Bless me, what a practice that young man has!” exclaimed the people at Bristol when Mr. Sawyer was called out of church. Bozzy’s readers would say, “Bless me, what would the Doctor have done without him!” He managed everything for him. A clever, capable fellow—could do anything, knew everybody. The Doctor was a child in his hands, but let him have the credit of everything. He took all his rough treatment without a murmur.

Thomas Carlyle, in his generous vindication of Boswell, has contended—and his view has been usually accepted—that it was a fine trait in his character that he should have chosen to attach himself to a humble and struggling writer, a sort of “auld dominie,” without influence, instead of to some person of importance in the social or political world. Such patronage, if he had expended the same pains and toil he had done on Johnson, would have been more profitable. But this view, sagacious as it is, seems a little

utopian. It brings us at once to the consideration of what was Bozzy's plan of life, and how he proposed to play its great game. He was ambitious, eager to get forward and make a show, to get to know folk, attract attention, and be talked of. He set his mind on going into the Guards, but his father would not consent, and insisted on his joining the Scottish Bar. With difficulty he was brought to agree, making terms that he was to be allowed to see the world first. He made a wonderful little tour—made acquaintance with such notables as Voltaire, Rousseau, Wilkes, Paoli, and others; keeping a "mistress," even. When he returned he showed an extraordinary eagerness to become acquainted with Dr. Johnson, and by a wonderful chance, for it was quite an unusual thing with the great man, the Doctor took a fancy to him, liking him from the first. Without this the public stock of harmless pleasure would have been fatally impoverished, and we should have lost the great book; for no one to whom Johnson was merely tolerant would have been admitted to such intimacy. When Boswell found, moreover, what a power Johnson was in his own circle, and what a brilliant, important circle it was, and how admired and respected he was by the public, he saw that here was a strength and support which might carry him very far, bring him friends and the notoriety

he longed for. The Doctor was talked of: *he* would come to be talked of also.

The remarkable and all but unique incident of the intimacy—that the principal tyrannized over, insulted, and degraded his “follower” by abuse and humiliations, treatment that was endured for twenty years with only patient remonstrance—can only be explained, it appears to me, by Boswell’s settled purpose to endure to the last without flinching, with a view to carrying out his fixed plan. Nothing else will account for it. The sorriest, meanest drudge, on some extreme insult, will turn at last. Boswell was determined not to break with his patron and master; were he to do so, his whole life-plan would be shipwrecked and all his already invested “savings” lost. Dismissed in disgrace from his master’s service, he would have no more opportunities; the Johnsonian set would look coldly on, or take up the quarrel; he could not with comfort attend the Club. That this is no mere speculation is certain, for at the end of Johnson’s life, on some attack more scurrilous than usual, Boswell’s long-suffering patience at last gave way: he cast off his allegiance, refused to be reconciled, would not even write to him, and let him die without seeing him.* And he is unnamed in Johnson’s will.

* This painful episode, hitherto scarcely noticed by the commentators, will be fully treated farther on.

All the while he was diligently carrying on his chronicle; but before he had been at this work very long, it must have struck him, and this more and more as the days passed by, what an immense share he was having in the business—how he was making himself prominent; how much depended on him; how, in fact, he “bossed the whole show,” led the orchestra. All the singers and actors depended on him and the places he allotted them. “It is I,” he might say, “who have really done it all.” Later on he would become more profuse in matters concerning himself. We can conceive the ideas and pictures that were in the great Boswellian soul. “Figaro là, Figaro quà.” For in all the groups there was one figure, centre of every group, intimate with all, and on equal terms with all.

The most striking and most ambitious of all his schemes of self-advertisement was the tour in the Hebrides, planned and carried out with steady perseverance through a number of years. It was to set the seal upon their intimacy and proclaim it through the land. How impossible seemed such a scheme, what difficulties were in the way! One might wonder how Johnson could dream of such a thing—of facing all the annoyances and troubles of travelling through a semi-civilized country; but the persuasive tongue of Bozzy never let the project drop, and at last he had his way. That and the

Dilly dinner were his great triumphs. The result, too, was what he counted on. All the newspapers were full of accounts of the enterprising travellers and their adventures, but it is easy to see that the whole credit was given to Mr. Boswell. He was the organizer, the leader, the arranger; he conquered all the difficulties, not the least of which must have been the humours of his principal, as well as his outbursts, of which Boswell gives only a few specimens. But there can be no doubt that his was the prominent figure.

This instance seems to me to establish incontestably the theory I have been putting forward, that Boswell intended himself to be the leading personage in his work, and that he should stand above Johnson. In this matter his claim was almost audaciously made.

Boswell had courage: though it was always a wonder how in those days of the duel he escaped being "called out" or chastised, if not for his words, at least for the gross offensiveness of his *tone* and insinuations. He certainly was bold and fearless, and we never hear of his having to apologize or make *amende*. Even when, as in the case of Sir A. Macdonald, he felt bound to alter something, he also felt bound to leave standing what was sufficiently offensive. His mind was full of artful little devices for shielding himself or carrying out his purpose. When put

on his defence, no one could write better or more effectively, and the half-contemptuous tone which accompanied his reasonings was admirably assumed. Everybody, save perhaps a few, liked him. He was considered pleasant company. Mr. Cradock, a noted *viveur* of the day, who knew everybody, declared him to be one of the most entertaining and agreeable companions conceivable. Here is another mystery, for Bozzy's vanity and folly must have been disturbing elements; but Cradock was thinking of his unfailing bonhomie and good-nature.

One of the prodigies to be associated with this extraordinary man was his carrying on his vast literary enterprise, a sort of encyclopædia, involving labours, researches, inquiries, etc., in the face of innumerable distractions of drink and debauchery, and the attendant depression from which he suffered so acutely. The feat was something heroic, and he carried it through triumphantly in about six or seven years. The "Tour" was comparatively easy, and apparently was all but ready for the press; for it appeared in 1785, a few months after Johnson's death. But the *magnum opus* was a different thing.

Boswell, thus supported by his great "Ajax of letters," might very naturally be tempted to "take airs," as it is called. He lays out all the opinions and criticisms on the various topics of discussion,

always adroitly seasoning his statements with deferential and submissive flatteries to his chief; yet I never can persuade myself that the very sober and sensible arguments with which he supported his views were really uttered by him *at the time*. As he was a practised writer, it seems all but certain that he recomposed and carefully arranged all he said to the very best advantage, and substituted for rather "floundering" and hurried utterances the measured arguments that we have before us now. And who shall blame him for this? Who could resist such a temptation? "This passage is poor, this argument weak—I see a point here: why not amend or rewrite?" he seems to say. I can fancy Langton and the other members rather astonished as they read these displays of their friend, who really must often have made a rather inferior exhibition. We know plainly that Bozzy was hardly a man to be attended to in the company of Burke, Windham, and Goldsmith. In the case of the latter, we can understand that Boswell rather dreaded his rough remarks, his blurting out blunt truths and criticisms. Bozzy in the hands of Beauclerk, that man of the world, must have been rather helpless. But in the book no one would suspect anything of the kind. This alone must make us uneasy as to the histrionic character of the narrative.

And thus we come round to the final con-

clusion. that this Boswell of Auchinleck, by his dogged perseverance, his insensibility, his flexibility, deference, and management, had contrived to influence all performers, from the great man himself—Burke, Reynolds, Goldsmith, and the rest—all of whom had to accept and lend themselves to his methods, which methods had the one aim, to make himself important.

I can forecast that this theory will be unacceptable, and perhaps be received with hostility. But I am as convinced as that I am writing these lines that it is the only true view of Boswell which has appeared. This view is founded on human nature and character.

When considering how our author carried out his great purpose of self-exaltation, we must bear in mind that he was addressing an audience who were not yet familiar with his own personality, and who were really ignorant of all the grotesque details which have come to light during the past century or so. To such, Bozzy must have appeared a grave, pleasant, and capable man—highly important in his own circle, known to all the world, well read and even learned, and privileged with the friendship of all the leading literary personages!

This is likely to be a rather long and serious inquiry, but I think it will prove an interesting one. It will be shown to rest chiefly on the almost personal character of all the topics treated,

with a special view to everything Boswellian. It will be shown that his whole life-history, feelings, passions, doings of all kinds, are included in his book, and dealt with in the most minute fashion. The history of his religious views becomes an important factor, with—perhaps the most important of all—his disguised but settled purpose to minimize the accepted value of the Doctor's utterances by frequent disagreement and correction. It will be shown that Boswell speaks everywhere, always for himself, setting himself forth to the best advantage—and, mark! in a work professing to be the biography of another. We find, accordingly, nearly everything that is important about Bozzy told by Bozzy himself, such as—

(1) An account of his ancestors ; (2) full descriptions of all the members of his family—his wife, children, brothers, uncles, etc. ; (3) a full account on every opportunity of his own thoughts, opinions, feelings, criticisms—mostly opposed to those of the subject of his memoirs ; (4) a detailed list of all the books and writings that he had produced, with advertisement of the works he *proposed* to write at some future time ; (5) an account of his various journeys, travels, and movements ; (6) abundant and highly interesting revelations of his own feelings, impressions, retrospects, likings, dislikings, fancies, and the like ; (7) his private opinions of all sorts of notable persons, with criticisms on their

works and doings, and anecdotes disparaging and otherwise; (8) legal pleadings in Cases where he was concerned, all set out at length; (9) abundant letters of his own writing; (10) long disquisitions on political matters, the arts, music, etc.; (11) incessant refutations of Johnson's statements, to the establishment of his own more correct ones; (12) a number of conversations, presumably taken down at the time, but recomposed after the event.

In presence of these important departments, who can conscientiously say that such would be a biography of another? Would it not be much more properly the biography of the writer himself? It is only by minute examination that it can be convincingly shown that Boswell was all through intending to be the prominent figure.

It would be easy to conceive how Boswell, ruminating on his herculean labours, should gradually come to believe that Johnson lay under a load of obligation to him. What had he not done for him? Every department of the great book might be considered as in a measure his own composition or fashioning. In his carefully considered title-page we find a sort of abstract of these departments. It was the Life of the Doctor, the account, by date and place and adventure, of his progress—a rather formal business, not difficult to execute, as there was plenty of material to hand. It was the least important part of the whole, but one showing

much diligence and accuracy. I should say it filled about one-fourth of the volumes. This was his own work. But it was made to "comprehend" a vast deal more that was also the author's—"comprehending an account of his studies and numerous works in chronological order, a series of his epistolary correspondence *and conversations with many eminent persons,*" with his many compositions "never before published." But then comes this important notice, the gist of the scheme: "The whole exhibiting a view of literature and literary men in Great Britain for nearly half a century during which he flourished." Here was the point. He was to furnish "the view of literature and literary men," and, above all, the "view" of Boswell himself. Comprehending and comprehensive indeed!

But the bulk of the work was given up to the Johnsonian talks. And what *were* these talks? Boswell's own share really almost equalled that of the great Sage. He had written of Johnson's life through all its stages, collected his letters, together with scattered and hitherto unknown writings, had given abundant sketches of eminent literary personages—living portraits with spirited anecdotes of all kinds—and finally, and most important of all, had presented *himself* in the most abundant detail—in fact, it was an almost complete Autobiography, as it is the purpose of these pages to show. It is all Boswell, save—as has already

been accepted or assumed—the portion of “series of his conversations” which came from Johnson himself.

As he ruminated over his toil and drudgery during his twenty years of painful servitude, did it ever occur to him that where he had found so much he might also claim credit for what he had done in this department? The world, he might say, will give the Sage the whole credit for these utterances. They will exclaim, “How wise! How sagacious! What wit and what humour!” “Yet it is I—I, Boswell—who drudged, laboured, collected, shaped;” ay, more than shaped—*Johnsonized*—large and mysterious word, signifying anything from editing and altering to actual original composition—everything set down in his chronicle. Never in any known book was the spirit of exulting personality so exhibited—and without the least affectation. He talked and talked, lectured, abused, reviled even, as though it were the most natural thing to do—not for the world in general, but for specially gifted and privileged persons like himself. He spared neither man, woman, nor child—indeed, he has a special tirade against children as nuisances.

Boswell's Autobiography is assuredly one of the great books of England. But we might reasonably speculate, What would a cultured foreign critic decide as to its merits? It is strange that it has

never been translated, or even noticed critically, abroad. There it seems practically unknown. The reason is, I fancy, because it is unattractive and unfinished. It lacks art in the treatment. To us the *dramatis personæ* are all familiar—Goldsmith, Reynolds, Burke, Garrick, and the others; but to the foreigner these personages are rather unknown quantities. I am inclined to think that the long and repeated talks, and Johnson's disquisitions on morals and social life, etc., must seem very dull—rather tedious and uninteresting—to the stranger. We forget, too, that we know Johnson so well, have been “brought up” on him, and have *seen* him, as it were. The burly figure is interesting to us; but the foreigner has no interest of this kind. Yet it is curious that Bozzy's tour in Corsica should have been translated into Dutch, I think, and into Italian. As a biography, Boswell's work is hardly artistic.

James Boswell, or “Jimmy Boswell,” or, more familiar still, “Bozzy,” was one of the most unique and original of characters. He seemed to be everything at once—foolish, wise, humorous, popular and disliked, spiteful and resentful, nourishing enmities and feeling them as a state of suffering, affectionate to his friends, idle and dissolute, yet industrious, accomplished, well-read, generous, a student, a good and abundant writer, overflowing with vanity. All this, and infinitely more, we

learn almost entirely from himself. In fact, we might draw out a long catalogue of his varied and brilliant gifts.*

That Bozzy had the most ambitious designs, and reckoned confidently on taking high place as a social celebrity, is clear from his natural equipment, which was brilliant and varied. Were we to draw up a list of all his gifts and accomplishments, with his many traits of character, feelings, and idiosyncrasies, we should find that he himself has provided us with full materials for the purpose :

1. He was a well-read classical scholar, familiar with Latin and Greek writers, and able to quote from them. He had even read the Renaissance Latin writers, such as Sannazaro, Buchanan, and others.

2. He was a traveller, and wrote accounts of his travels in an agreeable, informing style.

3. He contributed to the magazines, and tells us the names of all his contributions.

4. He was an ardent lover of music, and thrilled on hearing his native "pipes."

5. He wrote verses fluently, particularly satirical ones.

6. He wrote a long and elaborate treatise on the

* I have practised this system all my life, and have learnt the art of giving a situation with a few effective strokes, suggested by a well-practised imagination trained at once to answer to a call. I have often myself wondered at how faithfully the descriptions represented the situations.

treatment of hypochondria and low spirits, from which he suffered acutely.

7. He was an amorist, the devoted slave of the ladies and of women generally.

8. He could conduct an argument or discussion with spirit.

9. He was a strong religionist: a "pietist," it might be called, "by profession"—*i.e.*, professing it publicly and openly, reading religious books, etc., *coram publico*.

10. He was *bon-vivant* and good comrade at a drinking bout, when, as he tells us himself, he often made sad exhibition of himself.

11. A man *répandu* at the clubs, taverns, nobility's houses, and other places, a diner-out, goer to parties, etc.

12. A barrister in moderate practice, engaged at the General Assembly meetings and before the House of Lords in Scotch cases.

13. A writer of prologues and occasional verses.

14. A bright and descriptive letter-writer.

15. He had a true sense of humour, and could on occasion be even witty.

16. He could tell a story admirably and artistically.

17. He was excellent company.

18. He was a politician, and offered himself for Parliament to the electors of his county. He was an excellent critic.

That Boswell's reading was vast is shown by the recondite and unexpected allusions, quotations, etc., which he is constantly making. Having said, during one of the talks, that "as a lady adjusts her dress before a mirror, so a man adjusts his character by looking at his diary," he added, "I next year found the very same thought in Atterbury's sermon on Lady Cutts: 'In this glass she every day dressed her mind.' This is a proof of coincidence, not of plagiarism, for I never saw the sermon before." In a discussion on truthfulness we find him quoting from "Rhedi de Generatione Insectorum," who quotes an Italian writer whose lines Boswell gives. He gives a passage from Lord Bolingbroke, and another from Pope's imitation of Horace—the antique story of Cornibabus, lines upon Acis and Galatea, Nash's "History of Worcester," etc.

How curious a thing, too, that when the book first came out no one ever thought of saying: "Why, this is all about Boswell! He has 'fobbed off' upon us his own life instead of the Doctor's." But Bozzy had managed the thing cleverly. It was hard to see what he was at, he had disguised it so artfully. Thus, there were those uninteresting law cases to which he got Johnson to supply armament for the negro argument, for this seemed to bring forward Johnson. But no! It was Bozzy's own case—and he was retained in im-

portant business. He had influence enough to secure the advice of so eminent a man. He was again the centrepiece.

Bozzy was then little over thirty; it seems wonderful that he should have attained so prominent a position. One would have expected that this gay young man would have followed someone of rank or influence; but no—he preferred the excellent Johnson. Now, any student of character, or even observer of character, would have been puzzled and interested by this, especially as Boswell, in his naïve manner, confides to us all his difficulties and embarrassments.

We follow his course abroad, where he was lionized—to Corsica, to Rome, and until his return home. Very few years pass over his head, when we find him perfectly at home in the literary “set,” knowing everybody that it was worth while to know. He was received as an author and literary man. Goldsmith, Burke, Windham, Dr. Percy, and other notable men, were his acquaintances. Then comes the famous Hebridean tour, where it is difficult to decide whether the conducted or the conductor was the more important. But we are impressed, and find that it is all very novel and original and unusual, this mixture of talk, touring, and travel. It is like so many little dramas. Mr. Boswell surely must be a very clever fellow, he stage-managed the whole so well.

Boswell's character was an attractive and engaging one. His was a truly affectionate nature; he was ever good-natured, obliging, and willing to do services for his friends, and to do his best for them. He had a feeling of interest and ardour in all that he took in hand, and a sort of native enthusiasm which was pleasing. He was not one of those who were "enthusiastic about nothing." Corresponding with his ardour was the intensity of his dislikes, which seemed uncontrolled, even beyond the measure of decency, as also his desire of retaliation. This feeling was often pushed to excess, when his utterances became all but libellous.

Nothing is more interesting than the study of a *mind*—one that is of rare and original description, unfettered by restraints and affectations, and of a pleasant, harmless vanity that will accept everything as compliment and say whatever it thinks, "giving itself away," without thought of the consequences. Goldsmith's was something after this pattern, though others could be "superior" and pitying. This "mind" of Bozzy's has never been analyzed or studied; and had it been, it would have furnished quite as much entertainment as the idiosyncrasies of greater men. It is certain, however, that no other account supplies such a curious mixture of motives, concealed or unconcealed, or reveals without intending it such strange workings

of dislikes, petty strokes, envy, and jealousy—yet all in a very harmless and amusing way. He exhibits himself all through as a comedian, and “lets himself go,” as the phrase runs, with a delightful ease and fluency.

Mr. Croker, indeed, fancies that a taint of insanity was present: “I should be inclined to think that an abnormal and extravagant vanity or inflation is the true explanation of the utter unconsciousness of absurdity which made him reveal, as a matter of just pride, so many ridiculous matters that others would have concealed.

“Boswell’s book, then, is a curious picture of the human mind in a vast variety of aspects, but there is one view of it—namely, the numberless little touches by which he exhibited, sometimes unconsciously and apologetically, his own follies and frailties, and, in fact, his own mental disorder. I have just hinted this, but abstained from dealing with it out of regard for his family.”

The hypothesis as to the book being Bozzy’s own story could be illustrated in amusing fashion by significant quotation. He often contrives to introduce panegyrics of himself. He gives Johnson’s compliments, which might have brought a blush to his rotund cheeks. Once, expatiating on Johnson’s influence, he ingeniously quotes some verses from a poem of his friend Courtenay. This “poet” touches off Goldsmith, Reynolds, Burney

Malone, Steevens, Hawkesworth, and "harmonious Jones"; then goes on:

"Amid these names can Boswell be forgot,
 Scarce by North Britons now esteemed a Scot,
 Who, to the Sage devoted from his youth,
 Imbided from him the sacred love of truth,
 The keen research, the exercise of mind,
 And that best art—the art to know mankind?"

This is pretty well. It may be said that to set out and quote a friend's praises of yourself is the same as praising yourself.

Courtenay added a note all about Mr. Boswell, and quoted by him. "Mr. Boswell, indeed, is so free from national prejudices that he might with equal propriety have been described as

"Scarce by *South* Britons now esteemed a Scot."

All which was deeply concerned with Mr. Boswell and his autobiography, but not with the Life of the Sage.

Again, how specially fortunate was it that Bozzy should have come upon the scene ready prepared, and fully equipped with all that was needed for his great office! He had absolutely all the necessary gifts — obtrusive "pushfulness," ardent love of society, unwearied pains, insensibility to rebuff, the boldness of brass, whatever that may be, good-humour, complete command and control of his temper, though feeling acutely and eager to punish.

No thought has been taken of Boswell's devouring eagerness to be considered a great or important man. He would sacrifice everything to that, and in his own book, prepared by twenty years' labour, he would spread himself out largely without fear or restraint. He brings everyone on his stage, ridicules them, eulogizes their sayings, shows them in absurd or respectable situations, proves that he was as important as any of them. This he could do now that he was free and that the tyranny was at an end. Once, when he told his friend that he intended to publish a book of reminiscences, anecdotes, memoirs, etc., Johnson scoffed at him; but now he would show the world what he could do.

Nothing is more perplexing than are Johnson's relations with Boswell in their perpetual little debating society. It has been assumed as a matter of course that when Bozzy chose to "turn the handle," at that instant the instrument was ready to play the tune. At any moment, at midnight even, if he chose to ask Johnson, "What, sir, do you think of a man who has been rejected by a woman in favour of another man?" etc., is it conceivable that the Doctor would be always ready to discuss the question? Yet he would have us believe that he was allowed the rare privilege. Boswell's was not a strong intellect; he could not bring much "contribution" to a mind such as Johnson's was;

and yet we find the latter always ready, on the moment, to discuss *every* subject. The truth is, such a state of things is impossible. Johnson had not this rage for private talk; he liked a large audience. And yet we are told this arrangement went on for about twenty years! Of course it may be so. Johnson loved to hear himself talk under any conditions; but, still, so "chattering" a companion would not have been a great provocative. There is some mystery behind—something that we know not. Of course, with the larger audience, Johnson was at his best and challenged to do his best. But Boswell has not told us of the many rebuffs he must have received. We may wonder at his adroitness in thus leading on Johnson to talk when he chose to make him talk—touching a stop, as it were. It seems quite an art. I knew the late John Forster, the biographer of Dickens, very intimately. He was a hearty man, and always seemed to me to be a sort of type of Johnson; he had his despotic way, and much intolerance. I used to be with him a great deal, dining, taking walks, etc. His opinions were always interesting, and his stories of men and manners most entertaining. I, of course, had not the boldness, enterprise, or cleverness of Bozzy in conducting such talks, and was more of a listener or humble suggester. But it was impossible for a moment, even, to conceive of any untimely dis-

courses at my own will and pleasure, or of "leading" the talk in any way. Nor could I dream of intruding myself at any hour for the purpose of a talk; I should speedily have been set down or warned away.

Nothing is more remarkable than Boswell's self-constituted supremacy over the large and motley crowd that he gathered about him in his chronicle. He disposes of them all in the most summary fashion—judging, ridiculing, exposing their secrets—and this in a haughty, contemptuous style that seems ludicrous when compared with his actual bearing. We are hardly prepared to find that he extended this treatment to his patron himself. He, too, had to fall into the ranks, and was duly called up for judgment and criticism: Mr. Boswell was supreme over all. Not that he dared to treat him as unceremoniously as the rest. His methods were more insidious. It really looks as though his purpose were to enfeeble Johnson's authority, by showing that his statements were overcharged and wholly mistaken, and particularly by taking on himself to prove that he was generally astray in what he laid down. Again and again was Boswell enabled to show from his own stores of erudition, that he knew more on the point than Johnson did. This course he persistently adopted from first to last. It seems a serious thing to say of the worthy Boswell, but it can be proved by

the clearest evidence drawn from his own book, where on every page Johnson is freely criticized, corrected, opposed in his theories, all with a view to fortifying the supreme authority of the writer. I have collected a goodly number of instances of this treatment; they will be shown presently.

In addition to his fixed purpose of elevating his own talents, cleverness, and importance, to the fullest degree, it seems to me that Boswell wished also to somewhat minimize these qualities in Johnson, and to convey that he had not been handsomely treated, and that Johnson really owed far more to him—which was true in a measure—than he did to Johnson. It is a painful and awkward thing to urge such things, and I anticipate some clamour, and even angry protest, from devoted admirers, but I really think there is considerable evidence for this view of the matter. And we must look to what Bozzy's character was; it had much of petty spitefulness, was full of little arts and contrivances, and he generally preferred the crooked to the direct path.

A very disagreeable element in the relations of the Sage and his "follower," painful almost to think of, were those gross and insulting attacks into which Johnson too often broke when irritated by the folly of his pupil. Some are quite unworthy of a high character, and, as an example of a pitiable lack of restraint, witness one notable instance.

One might almost think that he wished to goad Boswell into rebellion, and to giving him notice of withdrawal from his service. This step Boswell was too prudent to take, for he had his grand purpose in view—in which he had sunk his whole capital. So he bore all patiently.

But it would be an incredible thing to suppose that he did not suffer, or did not deeply resent these outrages. He must have been superhuman, and even heroic, in his patience and forgiveness, if he did not. Appeal, of course, will be made to his constant affectionate protestations of love and veneration for his chief, to prove that resentment never rested a moment in his mind. But he was too adroit to take the public into his confidence in that respect. Again, wonder has often been expressed that he should have revealed these scenes, in which he figured in so degraded a way. But could it have been his intention to exhibit Johnson as subject to such failings, as well as to show his own patience? Who, when considering the behaviour of the pair in the different situations, would not contrast the restraint of Boswell with the unbecoming violence of Johnson? And this should be marked, that a time was to arrive at the close when Boswell, weakened and rendered morbidly sensitive by indulgence in drink, was to fling away his long restraint and cast off all allegiance.

Having thus reviewed at some length the varied

“anfractuositities” of this singular character, I will now show in detail, and by departments, the various “motor forces” which he used for the purpose of asserting his supremacy. I hope to prove that Boswell never omitted any element that could bring him reputation or impress the public.

CHAPTER II

FIRST MOTOR FORCE—STRONG RELIGIOUS FEELING

A HIGHLY important element in Boswell's disposition seems to prove more than anything else his purpose of making his book the reflection of his very self. Strange as the statement may appear to those who know how disorderly was his character, it may be said that the chief motive force of his whole life can be traced to his strong, overpowering sense of *religion*. True, it was of a rather spurious kind, founded on sentiment if not on superstition, and based on "impressions" rather than practice. But he had the deepest reverence for religion, and it was always and all through present. He was courageous even in "standing up" for it, and did not shrink from reading aloud passages from his favourite Ogden in mixed companies. Much of this influence might have been set down to a remarkable episode which really affected the current of his life, and which he enshrined in his volumes in a rather cryptic fashion.

We may imagine a biographer dealing fully and minutely with the religion of the person of whom

he is writing, and its influence on his course and character; but that he should to a much greater extent devote himself to the expounding of his *own* religious views, his fervour and ardent aspirations heavenwards, and should be continually introducing the subject for the satisfaction of his doubts and difficulties, would seem almost unaccountable. Under our theory, however, it becomes natural enough.

A great writer once found a pleasure in secretly storing away in his pages certain curious and painful incidents of his early life, the mystery of which was never known to his readers until after his death. Dickens, it is now well known, thus recorded that highly tragic business of boyish suffering and agony, the period of his "blacking" apprenticeship and torture. He quotes, for instance, the particular "brand" used at the White Hart; the flowers kept in blacking-bottles; a lord in his speech saying, "We bring up our children to be manufacturers, ironworkers, or *blacking-makers*,"—which no one does. There are few of his stories without an allusion to this "blacking" topic. Many a reader has wondered at the grim fascination exercised over him by this topic of blacking, blacking-bottles, blacking-polishing. What was the mystery here? He no doubt found pleasure in thinking how he had escaped, how he had been rescued from a horrible fate; that now he was safe, secure in port;

he felt a sort of grim satisfaction that he alone was the possessor of the secret. I fancy much the same feeling was in Bozzy's strange heart. Like Dickens, he had *his* mystery.

All careful readers must have noted how persistently Boswell drew Johnson into argument upon Roman Catholic doctrines, and how he generally contrived to extort favourable judgment from the arbiter. This he artfully did by praises, doubtings, or by finding fault, thus prompting Johnson to defend. In his comments he himself would venture on a gentle plea for the "old religion." Now, neither Johnson nor Boswell's readers ever learned from him that when a young man he had himself been a Roman Catholic, and had left his home to follow that religion in more comfort; and that he had been "rescued" and brought back to the fold by a skilled Scottish divine, sent after him for the purpose. It was characteristic that it was a Roman Catholic actress who first ensnared him, and then carried him away to her chapel. These odd "blends" were common with Bozzy. Here was an interesting chapter in his life, and we may surmise that his naturally pious nature was always haunted by scruples as to whether he had acted rightly in allowing himself to be reconverted.*

* John Hill Burton, who had gathered many interesting traditions relating to eminent Scots, gave Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff some particulars about Boswell's change of faith.

It is impossible not to be struck by the sincere and earnest tone of his inquiries on the subject, and by the way in which he pressed Johnson.

As a fact, Boswell had adopted no fewer than three creeds. He was born and brought up a member of the native Scotch Church; this he abandoned for the Roman Catholic faith; while after his acquaintance with Johnson he fervently adopted the Church of England. To this form he brought with him some remnants of his Roman belief, but these were its most important dogmas, such as Transubstantiation, Prayers for the Dead, and a

The family sent Sir John Pringle to try and reconvert him, on the ground of his worldly interests; while, according to other accounts, Baxter the divine was employed to work on his religious instincts. Sir John urged forcibly that he would forfeit all his prospects at the Bar, never be on the Bench, etc. Bozzy urged that "he must think of his immortal soul." "What!" answered the Baronet. "Why, sir, anyone with the smallest particle of gentlemanly feeling would rather be damned to all eternity than give his relations such trouble as you are doing." In the *Life* there are various allusions to Sir John, whom Bozzy seemed to regard with a certain respect and awe. On the visit to Auchinleck he charged Johnson to make no allusion to Sir John in presence of the old Judge. One would think it would have been a welcome subject, owing to the obligations the family had to Sir John. But it may be that here was one of Bozzy's artful devices. For awkward would it be, assuming that Johnson had not been informed of his conversion, had the old Judge broken out with, "Ah, mon, he was the chiel that brought back Jamie from the delusions o' Popery!" A not unlikely speculation.

sort of belief in Purgatory ; so that he may be considered a High Churchman of our day.

This element of Roman Catholicism entered far more deeply into his relations with Johnson than would be supposed. The pair were both earnestly sympathetic to the "old religion." Johnson was talked of as half a Papist ; Boswell *had* been one. It is extraordinary that in all the Sage's voluminous "Prayers and Meditations" we can hardly come on a prayer of a genuinely Protestant pattern.

In only one place, one of his letters, does Boswell give a hint of his old creed. Speaking of his friendship for Temple, the very thought of whom soothed his unhappiness, "His friendship I have tried, and found constant for more than half my life, *and whose worth my Popish imagination cannot help somehow viewing with sympathy.*" But in numberless rather artful passages he contrived little adroit pleadings for what was at his heart—pleadings which would be more significant than any of his quotations.

In his notes on Johnson's alterations of the sheets of the "Lives of the Poets," we find Boswell warmly defending Dryden from the illiberal attacks on his change of religion, "as if his embracing of the Roman Catholic communion had been a time-serving measure." Then he adds that "he himself has given such a picture of the mind, that they who know the anxiety for repose as to

the awful subject of our state beyond the grave, though they may think his opinion ill-founded, must think charitably of his sentiment."

Here speaks Boswell for himself. And what a significant passage it is, how full of genuine religious feeling! "The anxiety for repose as to the awful subject of our state beyond the grave"—there, surely, is a note of anxious struggle and of some deep-lying feeling whence he seemed to be striving to fight his way to the truth.

I am afraid—and reluctant also to say it—that the rather *artful* strain that was in Bozzy's nature was exhibited in his steadfastly concealing from Dr. Johnson his Catholic antecedents and Catholic tendencies. And yet he might have confided in him, and it would not have lowered him in the Sage's view if he had once thus lapsed. But neither by statement nor hint of any kind did he tell the public that he had once been a member of the Church. He dared not. What would the Club have said?—what his readers? And yet all the time he salved his scruples by showing sympathy for and by pleading for "Romanist" doctrines. And he used to astonish Johnson by enthusiastic outbursts of a "Romish" sort, as when he proposed to make a sort of pilgrimage to Chester Cathedral.

Johnson's own feelings towards the Roman Church are well known, even if we make large

allowance for his "talk" in opposition to others. He could defend all its doctrines seriatim on one occasion; on another would roughly scout the doctrine of the Real Presence as unscriptural. This was the Protestant or anti-Papal mood, which came on him tempestuously. That Church was at the time in so pariah-like a condition, so low and humiliated in England, that it could not be known or appreciated by the reader or scholar. But many who did not love Johnson were heard to repeat *that he was a Papist at heart*.

Boswell later reported Johnson's striking declaration on the "laceration of mind" that attends forsaking the Catholic Church. True, he seems to find a sort of soothing comfort in Johnson's occasional hostile denunciations, and this would naturally fortify him in his change of faith. At the close of one of the religious discussions, Boswell, quite unexpectedly, confides to the reader that he is a firm believer in the doctrine of the Real Presence. This was a bold thing to confess in those days, when hardly any in the Church of England held such belief; but it shows that our chronicler still clung to this great fragment of his former temporary faith. He also had a hankering after "vows" and monastic discipline, and clung to the doctrine of "the middle state." In truth, every saying of Johnson's in favour of "the religion" is recorded by Boswell with a

secret relish. He even goes out of his way to call attention to a fervent declaration of Johnson's in reference to a clergyman who had given up good preferment to join the Roman Catholic faith: "God Almighty bless him!"

Boswell, after "drawing" his friend on the subject of Roman Catholic doctrines, one after another, makes a sort of apology:

"I have thus ventured to mention all the common objections against the Roman Catholic Church, that I might hear so great a man upon the subject. I must mention that he had a respect for the 'old religion,' as the mild Melancthon calls it, even while he was exerting himself for its reformation in some particulars."

These are significant words, coming from the converted and reconverted Boswell's lips.

At Ulva he exhibited another curious trait of religious feeling. He mentions in his account that he went to dig a hole in a little ruined chapel, in which he buried some bones. He did not, however, tell Johnson what he was about. The latter says: "Boswell, who is very pious, went into it at night to perform his devotions."

His bantering friends must have been intensely amused at these constant religious outpourings. But he had no shyness or fear of laughter on these matters, and his enthusiasm prevented his feeling or knowing how absurd he was. Still, in all his

follies he had sufficient conscience present to feel that this religious feeling was superficial, because opposed to his practice. Religious impressions and religious readings are wretched rags—nay, snares even—if not supported by active practice. When one morning, in a sort of rapture, he was telling Johnson that he felt so good and so full of pious feeling, the Sage warned him: “Beware, sir, of impressions.” Like the Catholic, he relied much on “outward things,” as Thomas à Kempis calls them, to increase devotion; praying fervently under their influence. It should be remembered, too, that Johnson did not discourage him in these practices. It is but just to Boswell to say that he never lost an opportunity of marking his public support of religion. For instance, speaking of Langton’s appointment at the Academy, he calls him “that truly religious gentleman,” elected at the same time with Gibbon, who was “noted for introducing a kind of sneering infidelity into his writings.” It is characteristic that he adds: “I am also of that admirable institution as Secretary of Foreign Correspondence, by the favour of the Academicians and the approbation of the Sovereign.” When Langton somewhat indiscreetly introduces sacred topics in a mixed company, his friend takes care to report Johnson’s severe reproof. Of orthodoxy Boswell was, indeed, a vehement champion. What modern writer, in a book of recollections or memoirs, would

venture to boast that he had gone out and “received the Sacrament,” or would give an account of all he felt on the occasion?

Boswell's feelings of piety were much excited by his visit to the sacred shrine of Iona. It is almost touching to see how this good soul was affected: “I left him and Sir Allan at breakfast in our barn, and stole back to the cathedral to indulge in solitude and devout meditation while contemplating the venerable ruins. I reflected with much satisfaction that the solemn scenes of piety never lose their sanctity and influence, though the cares and follies of life prevent our visiting them, or may even make us fancy that their effects are only ‘as yesterday when it is past,’ and never again to be perceived. I hoped that ever after having been in this holy place I should maintain an exemplary conduct. One has a strange propensity to fix upon some point of time from whence a better course of life may begin.” Poor Bozzy!

There was a professional guide to take them round Iona, but Bozzy resolved to slip away and see what was to be seen by himself, so as to be undisturbed, and thus “receive the general impression of solemn antiquity, and the particular ideas of such objects as should strike my imagination.”

How natural and unaffected is this confession given to the general reader! Genuine it was—

for the moment, at least. Alas! he was too soon to relapse. Here we see his ancient Roman feelings reviving. We feel that under all these misgivings and heart-searchings there is a vague tendency to the confessional. As he was not prepared for this, he must at least confess to the reader, and make profession of amendment!

It has been said, of course, that Johnson at times entirely rejected certain doctrines, such as Transubstantiation, and spoke roughly of the Church; but this was according to his humour: and as death approached, he did not seem to draw nearer. But still, when we think how unrecognized, how almost non-existent for the general community, was the Roman faith, Johnson's interest in it was extraordinary. There are two utterances in this connection which seem to me of the greatest significance from what they imply: the blessing he invoked on the already mentioned clergyman, Mr. Chamberlain, who gave up everything to join the faith; and also the profound remark as to the difference between conversions to Popery and from Popery. A vast deal seems [enclosed within those deliverances.

On one occasion Boswell announced that he was thinking of publishing a Life of Sir R. Sibbald, who also had become a Roman Catholic, but later returned to his original faith, owing to the difficulty of fasting. Mrs. Thrale advised him to

leave the project alone: "To discover such weaknesses exposes a man." "Nay," said Johnson, "it is an honest picture of human nature;" and he urged that there were instances of other great changes due to motives as petty as in Sibbald's case. Boswell thought it "a very curious life," and no wonder, for it exactly described the variations of his own. Nay, we may guess that the reason he "reverted" was the same also—that he found the restraint too much for his love of pleasure. He must have been amused as they talked, knowing all that he did.

In one of their discussions the Doctor mentioned the objections to Transubstantiation, but Boswell earnestly defended the doctrine. He added the solemn comment: "This is an awful subject, nor shall I now enter on a disquisition upon the import of those words uttered by the Saviour which had such an effect upon many of His disciples that they went back and walked no more with Him."

Boswell's case was on a curious footing. It is clear that his original membership had left a deep mark—not so much from the doctrines which he held as from the tone and fashion of his mind and thought, which are recognizable by any member of that faith. For the initiated it is unmistakable. The struggle which poor Bozzy maintained through his life with his vices—now temporarily successful,



THE JOURNALIST, WITH A VIEW OF AUCHINLECK OR THE LAND OF STONES.

"I am, I flatter myself, completely a citizen of the world. In my travels through Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Corsica, France, I never felt myself from home."—*Boswell's Journal*.

now worse than before—is one familiar to all Roman confessors, who strive by the Sacraments to furnish greater strength. In Protestant Churches, the voluptuary often succumbs without any scruple, and little help can be furnished save from himself or the reading of the Scriptures.

Sin Boswell could resist but fitfully; and so he devised a system of religious feelings and impressions, fortified by reading Ogden's sermons. By constant pressure he obtained from Johnson a solemn pronouncement that pious aspirations were not inconsistent with sinful failings. This lent *Bozzy* great comfort. Johnson, who was not much of a theologian, gave his friend but dubious advice in this matter. There was nothing inconsistent, he said, between pious talk and vicious practice. So Boswell took it that both courses could be followed together. But, as I said, does not this show how eager was Boswell to "save his soul," and how much piety was in his thoughts beyond all other subjects? And so he rose and fell—and rose and fell again—until the day came when he lost his friend and adviser, when he fell finally, and never seems to have risen again. He found the struggle too troublesome and painful, and so "gave in." We can understand the point of his question to Johnson as to whether a previous attempt at a good life would stand to one's credit, or would death following on sin destroy all previous "good marks"?

He was told that God Almighty *would not take a catch of him.*" But how could Johnson know?

The whole character of Bozzy's religious equipment is best illustrated by what occurred on a visit to the Dillys. Here there was abundance of excellent fare and hearty welcome, so Boswell was in high good-humour. He arrived on Saturday evening, and on Sunday the whole party attended church. It was a display of piety in force, and one cannot help thinking that he wished to make a public display; for, "It being the first Sunday of the month, June 3, the Holy Sacrament was administered, and I stayed to partake of it." Bozzy was evidently proud of what he had done, and a little elated. Johnson noticed it, and praised him: "*he had not thought of it.*" Bozzy had been travelling all the day before, and probably had a jovial night, when the notion seems to have occurred to him of a sudden; for he is tempted to give a sort of homily to his readers, as though it might have occurred to them that the Doctor, not having duly prepared himself, was scarcely ready to rush to the altar. On which Bozzy assures us that "good men entertain different opinions on the point, some holding that it is irreverent to partake of an ordinance without considerable meditation; others, that whoever is a sincere Christian and in a proper frame of mind may," etc. "A middle notion I believe to be a just one; a long train of preparatory

forms was not necessary. But neither should they lightly and rashly venture upon so awful and mysterious an institute." Admirable preaching!

We can imagine the success of this exhibition, the congregation, it may be, asking "Who was the stout gentleman that went up?" They were told it was Mr. James Boswell, the famous Dr. Johnson's follower! After breakfast, excited and in a state of pious elation, Bozzy proceeded to "outpour himself" to his friend. "Being in a frame of mind," he tells us, "*which I hope for the felicity of human nature many experience—in fine weather—at the country house of a friend, consoled and elevated by pious exercises*"—what a jumble of things: fine weather and piety!—"I expressed myself with unrestrained fervour to my guide, philosopher, and friend: 'My dear sir, I would fain be a good man, and *I am very good now*. I fear God and honour the King. I wish to do no ill, and to be benevolent to all mankind.'" Johnson took all this folly good-humouredly, and gave him some sound advice: "'Do not, sir, accustom yourself to trust to impressions.' There is a middle state of mind between hypocrisy and conviction. He pointed out that at last you may become their slaves. Favourable impressions as to the state of the soul are deceitful. In general, no man can be sure of his acceptance with God. In other words, practical action—doing, not feeling—is the true outcome of genuine piety."

In this strange scene we find a perfect picture of Boswell as he chose to present himself to the reader. Now, in all his varying moods and humours, was there ever such a faithful portrayal of an eccentric being? It is clear it was all set down that very night, as every touch is fresh and vivid. But who is the chief performer? Not Johnson, certainly; all attention is invited to Mr. Boswell. We have to follow all the fitful changes of his meteoric soul. Why, on the point that languor succeeds excess of gaiety, he should appeal to "many even of my fair readers" is best known to himself. It at all events furnishes him with a "cue," for he goes off at once on his favourite topic of success in love. This, in a highly significant way, points to what was ever the dominant note of his character—that is, to the *exquisite pleasure of being in love with someone*. He was then supremely happy. Like Sterne, he "must ever have some Dulcinea in his head." The letters to Temple prove this convincingly.

Speaking of Gibbon, Boswell once more introduced his favourite topic. He had been, he said, an Oxonian, and was remembered there for having "turned Papist" (here a shade of sympathy is implied by his putting within marks of quotation the two words, as though they were a vulgar, disrespectful form). "I observed that, as he had changed several times from the Church of England

to the Church of Rome, from the Church of Rome to infidelity, I did not despair of seeing him a Methodist." Here again he must have been secretly enjoying Johnson's ignorance of his own variations.

There is a passage in his book where he makes an almost frantic profession of faith, so comic, in fact, that it would seem to have been set down under other influences than those of religious zeal. But he fancied that he was thus fortifying himself in his principles, even though there was laxity in applying them.

"If a man firmly believes that religion is an invaluable treasure, he will consider a writer who endeavours to deprive mankind of it as a *robber*; he will look upon him as *odious*, though the infidel might think himself in the right. . . . An abandoned profligate may think that it is not wrong to debauch my wife, but shall I, therefore, not detest him? And if I catch him in making an attempt, shall I treat him with politeness? No, I will kick him downstairs, or run him through the body—*that is, if I really love my wife*, or have a true rational notion of honour. . . . I do declare, however, that I am exceedingly unwilling to be provoked to anger, and could I be persuaded that truth would not suffer from a cool moderation in its defenders, I should wish to preserve good-humour, at least, in every controversy; nor, indeed, do I see why a

man should lose his temper while he does all he can to refute an opponent. I think ridicule may be fairly used against an infidel; for instance, if he be an ugly fellow, and yet absurdly vain of his person, we may contrast his appearance with Cicero's beautiful image of Virtue could she be seen."

When we think that all this was out of place, and had no connection with the narrative, which it disturbed and interrupted, we shall see that Bozzy's strong religious feeling obliged him to bring it forward at any sacrifice. For after introducing and critically praising Johnson's poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," he might have passed to his other works. But the good Boswell, who was enthusiastic over its fine religious strain, cannot resist introducing one splendid religious passage—a wholesome sermon that might do good to his readers; and he assures us, in a reverential passage, "were all the other excellencies of the poem annihilated, it must ever have our grateful reverence from its noble conclusion, in which we are consoled with the assurance that happiness may be attained if we apply our hearts to piety."

This, again, is *hors de propos*, but he could not resist the opportunity.

"Where, then, shall hope and fear their objects find?
Shall dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkly down the torrent of his fate?"

Enthusiast, cease ; petitions yet remain
 Which Heaven may hear ; nor deem religion vain.
 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
 But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice,
 Safe in His hand whose eye discerns afar
The secret ambush of a specious prayer.
 Yet when the sense of sacred presence fires,
 And strong devotion to the skies aspires,
 Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,
 Obedient passions of a will resigned.

* * * * *

These goods for man the laws of Heaven ordain ;
 These goods He grants, who grants the power to gain."

Noble words, indeed—and a revelation.

There are other minor touches which betray his feeling. He speaks of a monk who was hospitable to Johnson in Paris, and who afterwards came to London, where he received recommendations from Johnson. It is curious and significant that Boswell, who collected facts about everybody, should not mention that this person had joined the Church of England, and wished to get forward in it as a profession. He must have heard of so unusual a thing as a "conversion" of a "Romish" monk who was the friend of his friend. I fancy there was the old leaven here—and a secret disapproval.

It may be somewhat paradoxical to find a connection between these strong religious feelings and a longing to reach a high position in the world. There can be no doubt that all through his life religion was with him a momentous factor. He

never lost hold of his piety, or allowed it to be wholly submerged in earthly matters. He may be said never to have lost his faith, though he did fail in morals and discipline and restraint. This was one of the links that bound him strongly to Johnson. Transubstantiation, vows, an indulgent partiality for the monastic state, veneration for sacred places, love of ritualism, pious reasonings—these were the links. Both he and Johnson read and loved “The Imitation of Christ.” From Johnson, therefore, and his talks and counsel he drew a fountain of piety; but Johnson spent all his efforts to teach him practical conduct, without which lip-piety is a mere delusion.

Bozzy was quite conscious of the grotesque antagonism between his practice and his phantom pietism, and of the ridicule it brought. His laxity, to speak mildly, was only too notorious, and to see the friend of the abandoned Wilkes, his admirer and boon companion, taking Ogden out of his pocket and offering to read a chapter must have been greeted with irreverent laughter. Poor Bozzy struggled to reform, but could not shake himself free. Yet he never loosed his hold. He felt all the time that he *had* true faith, and that he intended to do right, but could not. He would show the world outside that the scoffers were all wrong, that he was decent and respectable, and was not ashamed of his belief. And he would proclaim

openly that he tried to do good, but was drawn after evil. His great book should plead for him, should show him to be a solid, thoughtful, studious man—a man ever anxious to know and to learn, a man whose temper and patience had been sorely tried by weaknesses which made him seem something of a libertine; but this was the weakness of the flesh, where he found himself helpless. True, this is a rather pitiful combination, but I have not the least doubt that poor Bozzy was sincerely religious, or wished to be so, and clung conscientiously to his faith. Nothing ever shook that, yet he could not repel an agreeable or attractive infidel. With this view of “testifying” he carried his Ogden in his pocket, and was ready at any moment or in any unsuitable company to produce it.

The reader will be rather surprised to find what a large area in Boswell’s mind was covered by this topic of religion, and what a force it must be counted when we are dealing with his character. In this important matter he was not satisfied. He was uneasy in his mind, but saw no way to settlement of the matter he had at heart. With this feeling he called in Johnson’s aid, and made him expound and preach to him. And he tells it *all* to the reader.

There is only space to “adumbrate,” as it were, this most interesting question, which seems to me to throw quite a new light on Bozzy’s character—usually supposed to be frivolous and volatile.

CHAPTER III

SECOND MOTOR FORCE—LEVELLING DOWN JOHNSON

WE next come to another portion of Boswell's mechanism for building up his importance and supremacy. There was a little insidiousness in his method, and it was so cleverly disguised that, like so many other matters, it has completely escaped the notice of official commentators. For them, as for all the world, he was the adoring, grovelling, all-suffering Bozzy, and the great Sage was "the god of his idolatry"; yet who thinks that all the time he was craftily depreciating him, lessening the value of his grand utterances? Much of this vilipending was unconscious or instinctive, and was due to his being unable to stifle his pleasure in pointing out mistakes or faults. But to point out mistakes and faults in the great Johnson himself was too exquisite a pleasure. And what an elevation of himself—the flouted Bozzy—in the eyes of the public, that the detection should come from *him*! The reflection would surely be: "Why, he knows more than his master!"

This may seem a startling and perhaps an un-

gracious thing to say when we think of the follower's known devotion; but it was only indirectly that he made these attempts, with a view to asserting his own supremacy. There is hardly a page in which he does not dispute Johnson's own views in his actual presence; and when away from the awe of his presence, he sets down boldly that he cannot agree, and that here his illustrious friend is altogether astray.

Nothing did he relish more than correcting the great man—that is, after he was gone and could not vindicate his statement. This he does again and again. In many cases, when it was quite safe, he stood up boldly to him; and after being silenced he seemed to grumble. Another part of his system was the exhibition of Johnson in some inferior situation, or when someone had got the better of him. These practices were pursued from the beginning of the book to the last page, when almost his last personal criticism of his chief was a pointed and resentful attack on his generally unfair treatment of himself personally. All through he had thus corrected or disputed with him, striving to insinuate that, though not as capable a being, he still had capacity enough to convict him of blemishes.

I expect, of course, it will be remarked how ungenerous it is to gather together all such unkind things of the amiable Boswell, whom we so love,

and who has furnished us with so much entertainment. "An attack" it will be called, the more unkind because it comes from a friendly hand and a devoted admirer, who all through his long life has been proclaiming his praise—writing his life, editing, defending, etc. But all this is in the nature of inquiry, nor is it to be taken *au grand sérieux*. Boszzy we look on as privileged and irresponsible, and as a great "human document." He seems to be one of the characters in the old comedy. Nor was he a free being, but the creature of his passions and humours. Finally, this is a powerful factor in the argument I am pressing, and it cannot be spared.

I do not wish to say that Boswell set himself deliberately to the work of minimizing or diminishing the value of the Doctor's authority. But he could not resist the tendency to criticize, and to prove that he knew much more than Johnson was presumed to know, and that on due consideration he had found that there were weak places in his friend's statements. And he applied the same system of correction to everyone: though he did not, in short, admit of any "cruel spite"; but he was born, commissioned as it were—or as he fancied he was—"to set it right." I am thus only attempting to carry out an analysis of his very curious, fluctuating, and interesting character.

Here is a most characteristic instance of

Boswell's turning some indifferent allusion to the setting forth of his own personality. Johnson in speaking of melancholy used the words "vexing thoughts." His friend must show that he knew as much and more of these "vexing thoughts" (happy words—but which Johnson used merely "in passing"). Boswell in a note stops to tell us that he thought the phrase "very expressive"—and so it is. "It has been familiar to me from my childhood, for it is to be found in the Psalms in metre used in the churches of Scotland (I believe I should say 'kirk')." Then the whole strophe is quoted.

Readers may wonder why our author should thus admire so superfluously; but we may assume that it is autobiographical evidence of his gift of criticism upon a point where Johnson was to be shown deficient. But he goes on further: "Some allowance must no doubt be made for early prepossession." As though a reader must be interested to know that the version was actually sung by Boswell *lui-même!* Still, he must say something more, and "rule" the case; so, "at a maturer period of life, after looking at various metrical versions," he is constrained to say: "I am well satisfied that the version used in Scotland is upon the whole the best, and that it is vain to think of having a better. It has in general a simplicity and unction of sacred poetry, and in many parts its transference is admirable." Surely this "rigmarole," as he called one of Hawkins's

criticisms, is utterly uncalled for in the Life of a friend.

Another incident that he records proves in an almost convincing way how he held himself forth as the chief and most important personage in the Scotch adventure. Here there is a pleasant tone of patronizing: "I found his [Johnson's] journey the common topic of conversation at this time, wherever I happened to be. At one of Lord Mansfield's formal Sunday evening conversations—*strangely called 'levees'*—his lordship addressed me: 'We have all been reading *your* travels, Mr. Boswell.' I answered: 'I was but the humble attendant of Dr. Johnson.' The Chief Justice replied with that air and manner which none who ever saw and heard him can forget: 'He speaks ill of nobody but Ossian.'" The mixture of lavish compliment here, the homage paid himself, the graciousness of the noble lord, with Bozzy's affected modesty, make a truly amusing combination.

The Doctor was preparing a new edition of his Dictionary, when his friend put in his oar, as it is called, and suggested a correction. "I put him in mind of a meaning of the word 'side' *which he had omitted—viz., relationship.*" He inserted it. "He would not admit 'civilization,' but only 'civility.' With great deference to him, I thought *civilization*, from *to civilize*, better." He then proceeds to argue the matter.

When the Doctor gave his friend an elaborate "argument," several pages long, on the question of lay patronage in the Scotch Church, the other curtly dismissed it with this remark: "Though I present my readers with Dr. Johnson's masterly thoughts on the subject, *I think it proper to declare that, notwithstanding I am myself a lay patron, I do not entirely subscribe to his opinion.*"

On Johnson writing an epitaph in Latin for Goldsmith, Boswell disapproved. He was for English, and not Latin. As it was, he criticized it severely. It was not "sufficiently discriminative; applying to him the title Historian, Poet, and Physicist was surely not right." He had little claim to the last. He then demolishes the poor poet.

Johnson had written papers for a friend who took all the credit for them. Bozzy deals severely with this action of his chief: "I am not quite satisfied with the casuistry by which the productions of one person are thus passed upon the world for the productions of another." "Casuistry" was a rather strong word to apply to his leader.

Johnson having declared of a great French preacher that "nobody reads him," Bozzy in a note rather excitedly dissents: "I take leave to enter my strongest protest against this judgment. Bossuet *I hold* to be one of the first luminaries of religion and literature. If there are those who do not read him, it is full time they should begin."

Johnson objected to rhetoric and its action, and abused it. Boswell "thought it extraordinary that he should deny its power upon human nature when it is proved by innumerable facts in all states of society." Reasonable beings are not solely beings; they have fancies which may be pleased, passions which may be roused.

Johnson had said that a host who invited one for a week became a slave for a week. Boswell objected that there were hosts who made it a home for the guest. He then adds a rather disrespectful rebuke: "Here he discovered a notion common enough in persons not accustomed to entertain company, that there must be a degree of attention; otherwise company will think themselves neglected; and such attention is, no doubt, very fatiguing." This is a hint that his patron was not exactly the man of the world that *he* was presumed to be. On a question of copyright he admitted that Dr. Johnson's observations had been good, "yet I am afraid that the law is not altogether with him." Then follows an elaborate legal argument. "But in my letter to the people of Scotland there is the following passage—a concise, and I hope fair and rational, state of the matter."

He is always careful to record how often Johnson had to withdraw or apologize for some rude statement, as in the case of Dr. Percy, Goldsmith, Dr. Bernard, Boswell himself, and many more.

Of course there was an honest generosity in this, such as one would expect from the Doctor, but it is a rather undignified attitude. It may be said that Bozzy never spares his great friend nor bates a word.

It will be seen, as we go along, that Boswell's clear intention in setting out these corrections of Johnson is not to make formal statement, but to leave an impression, or an accumulation of impressions, which the reader is unable to resist. His scheme was thus a steady and persistent system of correction and dissent, with continued opposition: so that at last it is conveyed that Mr. Boswell, and not Dr. Johnson, was really the controlling and superior destiny of the whole—that Johnson was constantly falling into mistakes which he (Boswell) was able to set right, or at least boldly dissent from, and that, though the Sage might "thunder away" and storm and ridicule, Boswell was generally right as to the facts. Not that we can believe that such a state of things actually occurred at the moment, for Boswell was not so well equipped or "primed" as to be able to set his chief right on the spot. He had the obvious advantage of setting out his own share in the discussions at his leisure, and after making proper examination. He could thus at his ease measure deliberately all that Johnson had laid down. The accuracy of his historical illustrations he could test leisurely by turning to the works of reference upon his shelves. It would not be diffi-

cult for him, thus reinforced, to find his friend occasionally tripping, and thus make a show of superior knowledge. There is one instance of this method so typical of the rest that I may introduce it here. As an illustration the Doctor had quoted the fact that, though the King of Siam had sent an embassy to Louis XIV, the latter did not return the compliment. On which Boswell takes care to point out to us that Johnson was wrong or ignorant, and that such a return embassy *was* sent. This, however, he did not say to Johnson, for he did not know it at the moment. It is clear, though he does not admit it, that he looked the matter up years later, when he was putting his notes into shape. Had he known at the time, he would have deferentially corrected: "But, sir, are you certain? I have read in Voltaire's History," etc. It would have been a feather in his cap. It seems to me that there is something a little disloyal in this. How easy to have passed the mistake over! But no! he must show that he knew more of history than the great man. People would not pause to think that he (Boswell) had "looked the point up." We may take it as certain that Boswell adopted this system of "looking up" his facts in numbers of cases: for it is impossible that he should have been so well prepared with encyclopædic knowledge as he appears to be on many occasions.

Boswell has recorded his admiration of the "Lives

of the Poets," a work justly considered one of the classics of the language; indeed, few critical works have been more admired. But we find him actually rash enough to boldly criticize Johnson's incomparable judgment, taking objection to many things, rebuking him for not admiring certain writers, and all this at full length, as though he were a court of revision! This almost seems like effrontery. He points out that Johnson had made a serious mistake when he said that Pope had no noblemen friends of character, excepting Lord Bathurst. "Johnson *should have recollected* that Lord Marchmont was one of Pope's noble friends." Johnson made a further mistake when he charged this nobleman and Lord Bolingbroke with neglecting Pope's papers, etc., "whereas, as I myself pointed out to him before he wrote that poet's life, the papers were not left in Lord Marchmont's hands. Malone made in his hearing the same objection, whose love of justice is equal to his accuracy; yet he omitted to correct the erroneous statement." Thus he "rubbed it in" with complete gusto. In the Life of Parnell he "wondered that Johnson omitted to insert an epitaph," etc. Lyttelton was condemned by Johnson for thanking a reviewer for some praises, but Bozzy defended him. In the same Life, Johnson omitted a passage referring to the death of his wife. Boswell rebukes him: "I should have thought that Johnson, who had felt the severe affliction from

which Parnell never recovered, would have preserved this passage."

With some pride Boswell had sent Johnson his Latin thesis on being called to the Bar. To his surprise, he received in return quite a list of blunders. Bozzy sent him a complete vindication, with chapter and verse—that is, passages from classical writers with the same presumed mistakes. Johnson must have been confounded, for he did not reply. It must have been with some triumph that Boswell was able to dispose of Johnson's objections to his thesis. Johnson seems to have been astray *in omnibus*, but it may be suspected that Bozzy had called a council of the Latin Professors, who were delighted to find blemishes in the great Doctor's Latin. The exposure was, however, unkind.*

"I could with pleasure expatiate on the life of Dryden," he says: but *en passant* calls attention to one fact: "It may indeed be observed that in all the numerous writings of Johnson, even in his tragedy, in which the subject is the distress of an unfortunate Princess, *there is not a single passage that ever drew a tear!*" It "gave him much pleasure to observe" that the Sage allowed merit to Young. "He was

* It is interesting to have before me, as I have now, Bozzy's own special copy, nicely printed and bound. It is also curious to have in my hand, as I have, Dr. Cheyne's book on "Low Spirits"—the very copy which Bozzy had in his library, and which he consulted so despairingly for his malady.

most anxious concerning the ‘Night Thoughts,’ *which I esteem* as a mass of the grandest and richest poetry that human genius has ever produced.” Then he goes on to tell us, “there is in it a power of the pathetic beyond almost any example that I have ever seen.” He further decreed that “if there was one who did not feel his nerves shaken and his heart pierced, he must be of a hard and obstinate frame.” Yet this censure applied to the Sage.

It will seem a strange thing to those who have so long admired the Boswellian devotion to Johnson, to find that he was all the time disputing or refuting his patron’s views and affirming his own.

Boswell, while furnishing Johnson’s critical opinions of great writers, constantly dissents and gives his own. He emphasizes his position as general comptroller on every occasion; indeed, his own opinions are forthcoming whether in assent or dissent. Thus, after quoting his leader’s disapproval of Churchill, he tells us—“In this depreciation of Churchill’s poetry I could not agree with him. *But Churchill had extraordinary vigour both of thought and expression.*” This last is a rather smart satirical stroke. And, again: “I take leave to differ from him, having a very high estimation of the powers of Dr. Swift.”

One instance, at least, of Bozzy’s self-exaltation is a little suspicious, and seems to require corroboration. When they were at Inch Kenneth, where there

was an inscription, and Mary Queen of Scots' name, Johnson challenged him to give a fitting Latin quotation, and Boszy instantly and luckily thought of what Æneas says on leaving Dido:

“Invitus, Regina, tuo de littore cessi.”

Nothing could be more appropriate. But see what it implies!—a complete knowledge of the “Æneid”; for this is not one of the usual *quoted* passages, but merely a bit of the narrative. Then, what marvellous readiness—to have it in his memory and produce it instantly! No wonder Johnson exclaimed, “Very well hit off!” And so it was. I fancy, without wishing to be hard on Boswell, that when the challenge was given, he could not at the moment find anything, but that it occurred to him later—*l'esprit de l'escalier*, in short. And it was so *à propos* that he thought it a pity to lose the credit of the suggestion.

When Johnson explained that he did not allow his servant to say he was “not at home” when he really was, and justified it, Mr. Boswell adds: “I am, however, *satisfied* that every servant of any degree of intelligence understands saying his master is not at home, not at all as the affirmation of a fact,” etc.

Again, Boswell takes care to correct his chief on another classical question. The latter had described Garrick as chaining the ocean and lashing the winds.

Boswell suggests that it should run, "lashing the ocean and chaining the winds"; Johnson, however, could quote the Latin original. Boswell then, without opposing, corrects him by appealing to the Doctor's own translation of Juvenal :

"The waves he lashes, and enchains the winds."

He then tries to show on other grounds that his view is the right one. And one is inclined to agree with him. Boswell reports his "witty saying"—and so it is—on Scotch education: "Their learning was like bread in a besieged town: *every man gets a little, but no man a bellyful.*" This is racy of its author; but Bozzy, in an odd fit of propriety—it may have been from "sheer ignorance"—made it, "no man gets *a full meal.*"

His criticism of Johnson's criticisms, however, runs to many pages, so it is difficult to give an idea, without profuse quoting, of Bozzy's lofty *ex cathedrâ* style of dealing with his friend's work. Thus, when the Doctor asserted that there were no *literati* of any worth, he let the dictum pass without objection. Johnson told him not to join a tavern-club—at the Boar's Head. But his friend dissents in a note: "I do not see why I might not have been of this club without lessening my character." Hundreds of instances could be quoted of this general system of depreciation, but I content myself with giving a fair number. In all, the

conclusion is hinted that Dr. Johnson was rather hasty in his facts and opinions, while Mr. Boswell was ever the controlling and directing power.

Again, speaking of the pernicious effect of the "Beggar's Opera" in corrupting morals, he uses the odd phrase, "the *inefficiency* of the piece in corrupting society." Mr. Boswell dissents: "But I have ever thought somewhat differently." He then proceeds to give his view, demolishing Johnson's argument: "though given in the 'Lives of the Poets,' yet I own I should be very sorry to have it suppressed." When the Doctor disapproved of his using the phrase "make money," Boswell recorded his dissent, as usual, not to his friend personally: "But the phrase is, I think, pretty current."

His objections were often of the boldest kind. Johnson had declared that two people could not join in writing an ode. Boswell pertly objected that Beaumont and Fletcher had written plays together—which was quite a different thing. Johnson took no notice. He said that Mason was a bad writer. The persistent Boswell urged: "Surely 'Elfrida' was a fine poem; at least you will allow there are some fine passages in it." Then he wonders at Johnson's low estimate of the poet. "Of Gray's poems *I have expressed my high opinion*; for Mason's I have ever entertained a warm admiration. I have read them with pleasure, and *no criticism shall persuade me* not to like them. I

wondered at Johnson," etc. All which shows a wish to exhibit the incorrectness of his friend.

Johnson, with that wonderful memory of his, quoted some inferior poem which he had read years before. Naturally, he was astray in some of the words. He said the poem concluded with certain lines, which were four in number. Long after, Bozzy calls attention to the incorrectness of his friend. He later hunted out the book—and copied the passage, to prove that half a dozen more lines came after the others. The poem did *not* end with these lines, for others followed! This was peddling enough. Fancy Bozzy hunting up his book, and delightedly pouncing on the error! Johnson was virtually right.

After giving Johnson's curious prayer on the death of his wife, his communication with her through dreams or other form of manifestation, Boswell confides to us his own feelings in this truly significant passage: "What actually followed on this most interesting piece of devotion by Johnson we are not informed, but I, whom it has pleased God to afflict in a similar manner, have certain experience of benignant communications in dreams."

When Spence's Anecdotes—then in manuscript—were lent to Johnson by the Duke of Newcastle, Boswell "is sorry to think that he made but an awkward return—that is, he did not mention the

Duke's name, so that his acknowledgment is unappropriated to His Grace."

In his lofty way, Boswell took occasion to moralize over Johnson's absence from the absurd Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769, and actually censured the Doctor for not taking part in the revels. "He ought to have been happy to partake in this festival of genius. The absence of Johnson could not but be wondered at and regretted." All which lament was far-fetched, and had no foundation. No one else but Boswell would have dreamed of showing himself at this undignified raree-show, where certainly Johnson would have been quite out of place. No one ever expected such a thing. As for "every literary man of note being present," this was a complete delusion, no one attending but Foote—who was an actor—and one or two more of smaller degree. The thing, in fact, was a complete failure. But *Bozzy lui-même* was there, and no one could imagine, from his decorous account in his book, that he was other than a dignified spectator. His extravagance and absurdity were, however, beyond belief, if we may trust the enraptured account that he gives of his doings.

CHAPTER IV

THIRD MOTOR FORCE—ANIMOSITIES

THIS process of assailing others became in Boswell's hands a powerful engine for the assertion of his supremacy. Johnson in his talk might be severe enough to scatter his rebukes; but Boswell, as the narrator, was witness and judge. He both collected the evidence and passed sentence. Which of the pair, then, is the reader likely to consider the more important? Assuredly this eminent Drawcansir.

Boswell's ebullient nature, it is evident, was ever dominated by his own personality, which he would assert by every resource. He had a complete belief in his own supremacy—a belief that was another of the "motor forces" in this strange being. Thus believing in himself and his "infallibility," he came to think that any hindrance, opposition, attack, or offensive remark was a sort of heinous crime—of special moment, because directed against him. He was, moreover, unduly sensitive; anything reflecting on him rankled: he could not pass it by, and the offender must receive *public* punish-

ment. This may seem exaggerated, but it is strictly true. This sense of injury, with the longing to retaliate, was really based on wounded vanity; he was mortified at any rough jest, and longed to punish the jester. No one has yet noticed the importance of the great book as the flail with which erring friends and acquaintances were chastised. There everything was set right, the punishment long delayed was at last inflicted, and thus the great Boswell was vindicated. The number of persons who have the lash thus applied is perfectly amazing. All the ingenious arts of defamation are resorted to. The man, or woman particularly, who was so unlucky as to slight Mr. Boswell—for this was the greatest offence—was certain to be chastised. Still, it may be that this had grown to be a fashion or habit with Bozzy. He perhaps found, as many writers have found, that he had a kind of facility and brilliancy in noting follies and defects—and thus furnishing a sort of entertainment—and this *penchant* he could not resist. If the misfortunes of our friends furnish a certain pleasure, their faults and frailties are equally certain to amuse.

This petty spite, or malice, or whatever it may be called, was certainly one of the “motor forces” that impelled Boswell as he observed and wrote. As he did not attempt to restrain it, it betokens the natural character of the man, and becomes

a very entertaining study. But, above all, it is a distinct department of his personal life—his autobiography, in which he relates with perfect frankness his generous opinion of everybody, particularly of his friends. But all the time we must murmur to ourselves: “Where does the great Samuel come in?” He does not come in, but often has to stand aside and wait all through Boswell’s work. To illustrate this highly amusing chapter in Bozzy’s life, I will venture to examine a number of these little “animosities,” as they may be termed, as well as the incidents which engendered them. These are not seen upon the surface, and would quite escape the general observer. But all are significant, and illustrate the various features of Bozzy’s odd and perplexing soul.

A careful, minute study of the book, continued perhaps for years, would certainly bring to light the secret reasons and motives for so many of his statements, whether prompted by dislikes, or hopes, or fears. This I have partially done. But one would be almost inclined to think that the *whole* was dictated by little mechanisms of this kind. Boswell was so discursive when speaking of himself and his friends and their various transactions, that it was impossible for him to disguise the personal motives below. It was, indeed, a special note of his character to view everything, not neutrally, but from the point of view of *his* dis-

likes or partialities. He must love or hate. Hence all he wrote was more or less coloured in one or the other direction, as his own warm, enthusiastic temperament led him.

As Bozzy, in his exuberant ardour, was constantly adding to his list of acquaintances and friends, these naturally presented themselves to him in two forms—the most intimate relations, the most devoted attachments, as well as resentments and vendettas quite as violent. Forward persons are often highly sensitive, and no one more resented than Boswell any repulse or check. He was a good hater; an offence against him seemed a crime. His restless spirit was ever busy, hurrying to and fro retailing his grievances; an offensive gibe rankled. Being in constant touch with this tribe of intimates, busy with all their tales and intrigues, his world was well filled up. So when he came to write of Johnson's dealings with this motley crowd, he saw his own figure and heard his own voice everywhere. It seemed impossible to him to give a view of the scene without introducing himself into every transaction. The Sage, of course, in mere talk might be supreme; but as for the actual business of the scene, that was *his* affair!

All classes and professions—Lords, Bishops, Ministers, writers, politicians—are passed in regular review by our author, to be censured, approved, sneered at, laughed at, or criticized in some

fashion. Johnson may chance merely to name some personage, but Boswell feels that he is called upon not to let it pass without delivering his *own* judgment on the character of the person. This is his almost invariable practice. He, as it were, "sits in permanence" to deliver judgment, not only on the persons whom Johnson judges or appraises, but on Johnson himself, whose verdicts he constantly sets aside on appeal, or at least with many compliments to alleviate the blow.

While detailing and illustrating the lives and characters of all these personages, it came to his mind how much was owing to him by them on the score of gibes, affronts, ridicule, etc., and he might naturally—having a gift for presenting ridiculous situations and absurdities generally—imagine that he need show no reticence now that there was a rare and legitimate opportunity for expressing himself freely. They had not spared him; why should he spare them? And what a chance for exhibiting himself in a great court or office of review, through which he would make them all pass! He would give forth all manner of personal details, and by assuming a naïve, unconscious air, as of one ignorant of all offence, would contrive to say enough to shock or make uncomfortable everyone thus treated.

The effect of this running personal commentary must have been extraordinary, as well as the im-

pression left by the writer. The reader could not but feel that here was a man enormously *répandu*, intimate with all, and of sufficient power to take up a judicial position; passing judgment on everybody, freely retailing stories of all kinds to their disadvantage, when he felt that this was possible. Little wonder that he speedily set Johnson aside, and stood forward as the grand controller and centrepiece, one who took on himself the office of general critic, ranging to and fro, speaking both good and evil, dealing out censure and praise, with unabashed confidence in himself and reckless courage as to consequences. He is thus unconsciously writing his own life, his feelings and doings, and only incidentally that of another.

Not a single one was left untouched—bosom friend, acquaintance, stranger. Passages all but libellous abounded. We may conceive the rage, the annoyance and mortification, not so much at what the persons were reported as saying, as at the offensive things they were reported to have said of others. The most private conversations were given at length. Is it not likely—and Dr. Percy says as much—that all doors were closed against him, and that he was generally “dropped”?

These things, I say, are not recorded, but must inevitably have occurred, and poor Bozzy must have looked round ruefully as he stood alone in

his desertion. Is it so wonderful that he fled to the bottle for comfort? His last years of isolation must have been irksome to the cheerful, genial being. He was steeped in debt; he had a family nearly grown up, but found only expense and disappointment in them. His daughter was an eccentric personage, and a trouble. As he had lost his wife, there was no one to look after his children. He spent some years in the undignified calling of heiress-hunting. Disappointment met him in everything—at the English and Scottish Bars—in politics, where all his patrons failed him when he hoped to get into Parliament. His book was his only comfort, but, as we have seen, its very success must have brought him anxieties and mortification. Again, it was not unnatural that he should seek relief and forgetfulness in the bottle.

Boswell, feeling that he had the support of his tremendous friend, was likely enough “to take airs,” and become arrogant. This extraordinary connection made people stand rather in awe of him, for he spoke with two voices—his chief’s and his own. Thus inflated, he became resentful at anyone who appeared to deride his high position as Dr. Johnson’s deputy and follower. Little dreamed this clever and brilliant group of men that every word, every unpleasant and unflattering discussion, was being “taken down”; and not only taken down, but “Johnsonized,” and pointed by

the best of Bozzy's lively and rather malicious wit. They may have fancied—good, easy souls!—that they had “taken him down a peg,” and had shown the futility or nonsense of what he had been saying. But when the revelation came they were to find that all the superiority was with him. He was one indeed “ill to gey with.” He would bate not a jot of his reports. He filled in his pages with unflattering tales—piquant stories, ridiculous situations—while the Doctor had to stand aside and wait till his turn came.

Against these gross personalities there were, of course, angry protests. Yet we can fancy him “giving a piece of his mind” to a remonstrating friend, and protesting with astonishment that he had only a mechanical part in the business. He merely reported. How was he to blame? Boswell was perfectly genuine in holding this position, which he held all through, no matter how insulting the passage. Had he not transcribed it from his journal?—had he not consulted that record, and found the copy perfectly accurate? Here we think of Dodson and Fogg, who used the same argument to Mr. Pickwick when he wanted to know the grounds of action against him. “‘The writ, sir, which commences the action,’ continued Dodson, ‘was issued regularly. Mr. Fogg, where is the *præcipe* book?’ ‘Here it is,’ said Fogg, handing over a square book with a parchment cover. ‘Here is the entry’

resumed Dodson: “Middlesex, *Capias Martha Bardell, widow, v. Samuel Pickwick*. Damages, £1,500. Dodson and Fogg for the plaintiff, August 28, 1827.” All regular, sir; perfectly.’ And Dodson coughed and looked at Fogg, who said ‘Perfectly,’ also. And then they both looked at Mr. Pickwick.”

The feeling that he was sitting in judgment on the whole gathering, and could dispense praise and censure and ridicule in a fashion unrestrained by propriety, or even decency, gave him a sense of power and prominence that was quite extraordinary. He was the centre. The chronicle became really the chronicle of himself and his doings, and the great Doctor was but a single subsidiary figure in the large groups. Hence the record of the petty animosities becomes a significant and most important episode in his biography.

This topic of his dislikes furnished another proof of his fixed purpose to make himself prominent in his chronicle, and show himself forth as a predominant partner.

A man, when recording his hero's course in a biography, may be fairly entitled to introduce himself, on due opportunity—when his presence may be of advantage to his hero. But certainly his private vendettas, hatreds, dislikes—elaborately dwelt on—are out of place, and should have relation only to his own life and feelings. They have

nothing to do with the subject of the narrative. All those who offended Bozzy, or displeased or mortified him, are duly registered for treatment. He, as it were, "pays them off." Even his kindest and most affectionate friends are made to feel, by some slighting mention or awkward allusion comically described, that they have at one time or another either assumed undue airs or asserted themselves at his expense, and have therefore incurred punishment. Constitutionally he was "a good hater," and a conscientious one. He had no hypocrisies in the matter. He was not ashamed to let it be seen that he had a grudge against this or that man. In certain conspicuous instances he proclaimed openly that he would punish everybody who had offended him, and "make them smart."

His own talk, his letters in abundance, his adventures, pedigrees, travels, law-cases, tipsiness, are all duly set down; and where allusions are obscure, they are significant enough to set us on the search for the explanation.

Boswell was a stout, portly, imposing being, with a double chin and full stomach, and yet he had all the petty weaknesses and narrow views of a small man. His spite, sensitiveness, and dislikes were exceptionally acute, and he pursued the objects of his dislike with relentless animosity. Sir John Hawkins, Mrs. Thrale, Miss Seward,

Goldsmith, Sir A. Macdonald, and many more, were all thus assailed. His feeling may be gauged by what he said of Gibbon: "He poisons the Club to me." The crime of these people was that they had interfered or interposed in some design of his own. He was intensely jealous. So mad was he in his determination to attack his enemies, that he lost all sense of personal danger, and often made the most libellous statements. His readers accept them as amusing eccentricities, not knowing, it may be, what were his grievances, or that in his morbid hatred he was avenging some mere slight or fancied wrong.

Perhaps the happiest and most typical specimen of Boswell's fashion of imparting disagreeable things to his friends, with an innocent air of saying something pleasant, was a question on a delicate matter that he put to Johnson at Ashborne. "Wishing to be satisfied what degree of truth there was in a story told much to his disadvantage by a friend of Johnson's, I mentioned it to him in direct terms." It was a painful and discreditable incident, which he ought to have put from him on the instant. A friend who had helped Johnson in his distress—released him from a sponging-house and shown him great kindness—himself fell into distress and was put in prison, news of which was carried to Johnson while he was at dinner. In the most unfeeling way he went on eating and drinking.

The sister, who was present, reproached him with his base ingratitude. Johnson said he owed him nothing; what he had done he would have done for any one—for a dog, even. Imagine the unabashed Bozzy stating these things to his friend, all the time merely asking for information *à la* Rosa Dartle! How Johnson kept his temper under this inquisition is astonishing. He declared that the story was absolutely false, and that he never knew of the arrest. He admitted that he might have made some criticisms on the gentleman, but they were all general, and spoken after his death.

Under these circumstances, surely the proper course was to have passed the matter by. But the whole is duly figured in the chronicle, and the reader begins to speculate whether there might not be at least *some* foundation for the story. As it is, the Doctor's explanation is hardly as complete as could be desired; for he admits that he *may* have made the speeches in question—particularly that about the dog. In fact, there must have been foundation for the story, and it was clear that Johnson could not recall the details. And how like Johnson it was, when so bitterly reproached by the sister for his ingratitude, to have made the retort!

Yet another illustration of Boswell's truly amusing knack—save to the victim—of saying a disagreeable thing in the most disagreeable way. The following could hardly be excelled :

A certain statement of Mrs. Piozzi's, which he had declined to accept for his book, he later found to be quite correct, so he made this *amende*: "I am obliged in so many instances to notice Mrs. Piozzi's incorrectness of narrative that I gladly seize this opportunity of"—what? begging her pardon handsomely?—nothing of the sort—"of saying that, however often, she is not always incorrect."

He excelled in this backbiting art, and showed original ingenuity. He had devised a method of setting a couple of folks by the ears with little trouble. His system was this: to take note of a malicious or sarcastic speech uttered by one friend of another, enjoy it heartily and think it "such a good thing"; then hurry away with it to this last, and repeat it with due *goût* and enjoyment, asking, however, quite innocently, "*Was the case so?*" He only asked for information. It was astonishing how many times he tried this device, as though it were the correct course to take. Fancy his walking up to that worthy old Scotch Judge, Monboddo, and saying to him: "My lord, did you hear what Dr. Johnson said to me of you the other day? He was speaking of Rousseau and the nonsense he talked. But he said there was this difference between you and Rousseau—the latter *knew* he was talking nonsense, whereas you did not." This actually occurred, so *Bozzy* assures us, who repeats it without the least consciousness of impropriety.

What man of courage, even, could bring himself to say such a thing to an old Judge of good reputation? I am afraid this must be accounted want of manners. "There, sir, is *your* want," as Johnson said to him. "His lordship having frequently spoken in an abusive manner of Dr. Johnson in my company, *I on one occasion during the life-time of my illustrious friend could not refrain from retaliation, and repeated to him this saying.* He has since published I don't know how many pages in one of his curious books, attempting in much anger, but with pitiful effect, to persuade mankind that my illustrious friend was not the great and good man which they esteemed and ever will esteem him to be."

On another occasion, Johnson, talking freely to his admirer, had said very coarsely of Wilkes that the citizens had all but elected him Lord Mayor, "though they knew he would rob their shops, knew he would debauch their daughters." It was shocking that this should be put in print—by a friend, too—and as sanctioned by Johnson's high authority. But Bozzy, as usual when an opportunity offered, at once repaired to Wilkes to relate this complimentary remark, and in his unique way proceeded to discuss with him whether *more point* could not be given to the censure by making the remark somewhat coarser. He expected that Wilkes would, as a matter of course, enter with

enjoyment into the merits of this nice question. Bozzy thus explains: "I think it incumbent on me to make some observation on *this strong satirical sally.*" Wilkes received it very good-humouredly, and perhaps justified Bozzy's forecast.

Again, when Mrs. Thrale had quoted Garrick's verse,

"I'd smile with the simple, and feed with the poor,"

Johnson said: "Nay, my dear lady, this will never do. Poor David! Smile with the simple! What folly is that? And who would feed with the poor that can help it? No, no; let me smile with the wise and feed with the rich." "*I repeated this sally to Garrick, and wondered to find his sensibility as a writer not a little irritated by it.*" The wonder would have been had Garrick not been annoyed; Bozzy's innocence, real or affected, is almost engaging.

By this sort of double-barrelled disagreeableness he contrived to make two people uncomfortable. Thus, when Johnson was seated by Wilkes, Bozzy suggested that it was the lion lying down with the kid. He mentioned this to the Bishop of Killaloe, who amended it to "*with the goat.*" "Such, however, was the engaging politeness and pleasantry of Mr. Wilkes, and such the social good-humour of the Bishop, that when they met at dinner they were mutually agreeable." Yet both were to read

the account in print! Wilkes, for whom Boswell had always affected the warmest friendship, was strangely selected for sneers and gibes, as the above specimen shows; yet in the same breath he oddly adds a clumsy compliment.

Soame Jenyns having written a book on "The Origin of Evil," Johnson dealt with it controversially, and was accounted to have demolished his theory. After Johnson's death an epitaph appeared in the papers; "illiberal and petulant," Boswell calls it, "with all the vulgar circumstances of abuse, which had circulated amongst the ignorant." Jenyns was "then at a very advanced age, and had a near prospect of descending into the grave. I was very sorry for it, for he was then become an avowed and (as my Lord Bishop of London, who had a serious conversation with him on the subject, assures me) a sincere Christian." This ought to have shielded him. "He was not to expect that Johnson's numerous friends would tolerate such treatment." Accordingly, Bozzy wrote a very spiteful epitaph, "prepared for a creature not quite dead yet." And so the unjust and sarcastic epitaph was met in the same public field by an answer in terms by no means soft, and such as wanton provocation could alone justify.

" Here lies a little ugly, nauseous elf,
Who, judging only from its wretched self,
Feebly attempted, petulant and vain,
Th' origin of evil to explain.

A mighty genius, at this other elf displeased,
With a strong critic grasp the urchin squeezed :
For thirty years its coward spleen it kept,
Till in the dust the mighty genius slept ;
Then stunk and fretted in expiring snuff,
And blinked at Johnson with its last poor puff."

This is poor enough. But it is difficult not to suspect that Boswell must have had a secret grudge of his own. And so he had, for had not Jenyns written of *him*?—

“ Boswell and Thrale, retailers of his wit,
Will tell you how he wrote and coughed and spit.”

This affront—to be the first of many—stung Boswell. It made it the more offensive that he should be coupled with Mrs. Thrale. The last words of the epitaph are grossly personal. Why, however, Boswell did not attach his name is a little puzzling. Jenyns had died many years before, and could not harm him. It is really a rather ribald production.

There is nothing more characteristic in this direction than his treatment of the Scotch Baronet, Sir Alexander Macdonald, whom the travellers visited at Armadale. Taken in itself, his account displays an amount of rudeness and ungentlemanly behaviour that to all readers must seem unaccountable. The Baronet received them and sheltered them, he was a friend of Johnson's, and yet Bozzy pursued him with relentless hostility, and actually

so libelled him in his book that before its appearance he had to cancel passages, and later withdraw others, under threat, it was said, of chastisement. What did it all mean?

But there is a curious and truly interesting mystery associated with these passages. Boszy was always careful not to let the motives of his animosities escape him, but he is so naïve in his treatment, and so displays his character, that it is not difficult to trace the secret.

Johnson and he had been well entertained at this place. Their host met them on landing, and brought them to his house near the shore. But Boswell described him in print as mean, penurious, unpatriotic, and, with shocking bad taste, says that the host brought them to this small house that "he might have an excuse for entertaining them meanly," instead of at his larger mansion, which was inland. Several of the grosser and more offensive passages were removed in later editions, and Croker discovered that a whole leaf had been cancelled. Later in the work Boswell spoke of his host, without giving his name, in the most rancorous terms, calling him "Sir Sawney"—a term which he applied to another Baronet who had also supplanted him in the affections of an heiress.

Now, the secret of all this rage and animosity was that Boswell had designs on a kinswoman of his own, Miss Bosville, a great Yorkshire heiress,



A BREAKFAST CONVERSATION.

"Mr. Johnson was pleased with my laughter Veronica, then a child of about four months old."—*Boswell's Journal.*

and found himself, to his rage, “cut out” by the Baronet. Sir Alexander was a man of ancient lineage, “The Lord of the Isles,” and later became Lord Macdonald. With proper dignity, he is said to have taken no notice of these ungentlemanly attacks.

In another passage Boswell says: “Col also told us that the same person having come up with a serjeant and twenty men working on the high road, he entered into discourse with the serjeant, and then gave him sixpence for the men to drink. The serjeant asked, ‘Who is this fellow?’ Upon being informed, he said, ‘If I had known who he was, I should have thrown it in his face.’ Johnson: ‘There is much want of sense in all this.’” Imagine the Baronet’s anger and disgust on his attention being called to these unworthy passages.

Such libellous utterances could not pass without notice; the person mentioned could not fail to be identified; for Boswell says, “the penurious gentleman of our acquaintance, *formerly alluded to*,” and he had already given his full name and residence. No doubt there was a clamour. Some of his friends were, likely enough, scandalized, and so—an unusual thing with him—he made a sort of half-apology, or rather vindication of himself. “Peter Pindar,” always on the alert, attacked him scurrilously, declaring that Sir Alexander had threatened “his breech to kick,” which would have

been no surprise. But as Bozzy declared that he had altered and withdrawn under no pressure or compulsion, we must accept his word. It is likely that Sir Alexander pointed out to him the grossness of his behaviour, and required that the passages should be withdrawn; and this Boswell may not have considered compulsion. He would probably have retained them, as he did in similar circumstances, had he not seen that it was scarcely safe. His anger and mortification at this humiliation is shown by his protest. He was constrained to make a sort of apology, or rather explanation:

“Having found on a revision of the first edition that, notwithstanding my best care, a few observations had escaped which arose from the instant impression, the publication of which might be considered as passing the bounds of a strict decorum, I immediately ordered that they should be omitted in the subsequent editions. I was pleased to find that they did not amount in the whole to a page. If any of the same kind are yet left, it is owing to inadvertence alone, no man being more unwilling to give pain to others than I am.

“A contemptible scribbler, of whom I have learned no more than that, after having disgraced and deserted the clerical character, he picks up in London a scanty livelihood by scurrilous lampoons under a feigned name, has impudently and falsely asserted that the passages omitted were *defamatory*,

and that the omission was not voluntary, but compulsory. The last insinuation I took the trouble publicly to disprove; yet, like one of Pope's dunces, he persevered in 'the lie o'erthrown.' As to the charge of defamation, there is an obvious and certain mode of refuting it. Any person who thinks it worth while to compare one edition with the other will find that the passages omitted were not in the least degree of that nature, but exactly such as I have represented them in the former part of this note—the hasty effusion of momentary feelings, which the delicacy of politeness should have suppressed."

Admirably written! This sketch of Wolcot has the spirit of Johnson's famous letter to Macpherson. It will be noted that Boswell alters only the passages where Sir Alexander is named.

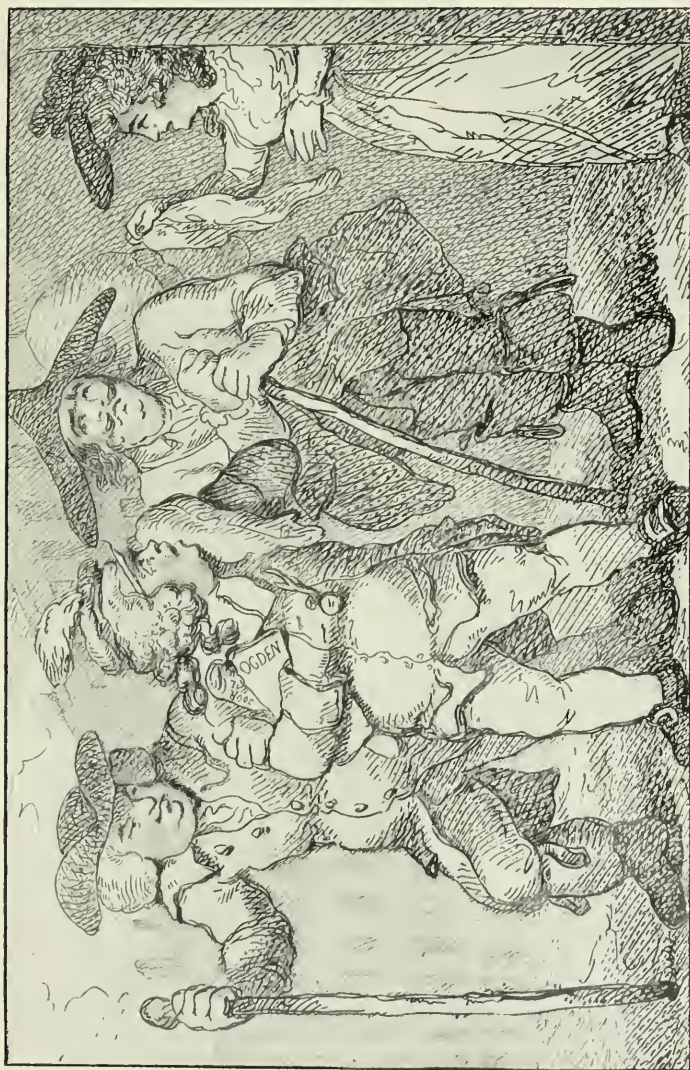
Boswell's venom and animosity were displayed to the very end of the Tour. He put it to the score of the Baronet's shabby treatment of his guests, but it was owing to his old grudge.

"The penurious gentleman of our acquaintance, formerly alluded to, afforded us a topic of conversation to-night. Dr. Johnson said I ought to write down a collection of the instances of his narrowness, as they almost exceeded belief. Col told us that O'Kane, the famous Irish harper, was once at that gentleman's house. He could not find in his heart to give him any money, but gave him a key for a

harp, which was finely ornamented with gold and silver and with a precious stone, and was worth eighty or a hundred guineas. He did not know the value of it; and when he came to know it,* he would fain have had it back; but O'Kane took care that he should not."

The jest of "my hearty friend," Sir Thomas Blackett—at the expense of Sir A. Macdonald (he roughly said, on being asked, "Was it not a handsome punch-bowl?" "Yes, if it were full")—was no doubt relished by Scotch lairds. But no real gentleman would have put it in print, with the names and all. Dozens of instances of this lack of good taste and good manners could be given. But how account for this insensibility? One reason was probably the same as that which made him so greedily seek acquaintances, and which made him advertise himself through the medium of such stories of intimacy. Another reason was that he was a complete *étourdi*; he never paused to think or weigh things. An incident seemed to him amusing and delightful, a huge piece of fun, and he must communicate it to others, for it showed his importance. Thus, in the punch-bowl

* Johnson seemed to rebuke these exaggerations, for it was plain a miserly man would not give away so valuable a thing. Indeed, it was absurd to say that an educated gentleman would be ignorant of the value of such a curio; whilst it is most improbable that a simple harp-key would be so decorated, or that it could be worth a hundred guineas.



SETTING OUT FROM EDINBURGH.

“Wednesday, 18th August.—On this day we set out from Edinburgh attended only by my man Joseph Ritter, a Bohemian, a fine stately fellow above six feet high.” — *Boswell's Journal*.

story he begins with "My hearty friend, Sir Thomas"; and there was, besides, the pleasant joke, the ridiculing his enemy, Sir Alexander—thus shown to be a penurious creature.

Even the amiable Goldsmith, who to me always seems to suggest the image of a friendly yellow-haired Irish terrier, does not escape. How anyone could feel unkindly to such a being is astonishing. True, Boszzy charges him with "envy," "malice," "ill-will," etc. The truth was, Johnson loved Goldy, as everybody did, though at times they laughed at him. On the other hand, Goldsmith did not properly respect Boswell. The latter saw plainly that Johnson had a genuine affection for the poet. How significant and natural is their little quarrel at the Club, the Doctor saying, "Sir, you are impertinent!" and later, "I will make Goldsmith forgive me;" and the latter's touching speech: "Sir, it is much from you that I can take ill." He never said anything like *that* to Boswell.

A happy illustration of Boswell's gift of distinguishing "shades" in character is this sketch of the poet:

"Sir Joshua Reynolds mentioned to me that he frequently heard Goldsmith talk warmly of the pleasure of being liked, and observed how hard it would be if literary excellence should preclude a man from that satisfaction, which he perceived it often did, from the envy which attended it; and

therefore Sir Joshua was convinced that he was intentionally more absurd, in order to lessen himself in social intercourse, trusting that his character would be sufficiently supported by his work. If it indeed was his intention to appear absurd in company, he was often very successful. But with due deference to Sir Joshua's ingenuity, I think the conjecture too refined. His person was short, his countenance coarse and vulgar, his deportment that of a scholar awkwardly affecting the easy gentleman. Those who were in any way distinguished excited envy in him to so ridiculous an excess that the instances of it are hardly credible. He, I am afraid, had no settled system of any sort, so that his conduct must not be strictly scrutinized; but his affections were social and generous, and when he had money he gave it away very liberally. His desire of imaginary consequence predominated over his attention to truth."

On the whole, we can read between the lines that Bozzy had a real liking for the engaging poet.

Boswell was constantly contriving to entangle himself in embarrassment owing to his attempts to show finesse or some ingenious method of arrangement. For instance, how simple a thing was it to lend his manuscript to the worthy Sir W. Forbes, the banker, who read it with delight and returned it with much praise. He went so far as to say that a person reading it would have a much better

idea of the islands than even one who had travelled through the country. Quite enchanted, *Bozzy* published this testimonial in full, with abundant return of praises of his friend. It seems there was some lavish praise of Sir William in the work; but this brought Boswell into trouble. For the banker, a plain, matter-of-fact person, required the matter to be explained; his letter had been published without his knowledge or leave, and he desired it to be stated that the portion containing Boswell's compliment was not in the manuscript which had been sent to him for perusal. It is clear that the banker insisted that this should be explained to the public, as his character was so high. But Boswell rather artfully conveys that this was a voluntary act, done "in justice to Sir W. Forbes." With some such device, *Bozzy* always tried to get out of his difficulties.

Boswell's grossest display of ill-nature and ill-manners connected with the Tour was his treatment of a worthy Baronet and writer, Sir John Dalrymple. This gentleman, on the pair leaving Edinburgh, had hospitably pressed them to stay with him at Cranstoun. Boswell's printed comment on this invitation is that he could perceive "that he was ambitious of having such a guest"; but, as he knew that Sir John had been assailing Johnson and his book, "I thought he did not deserve the honour; yet, as it might be a con-

venience to Dr. Johnson, I contrived that he should accept the invitation." They were expected to dinner, but Bozzy purposely went out of their way to see other folk, and so it became very late. When they arrived they did not much care, though a special sheep was to be killed, etc. The pair had great fun over the picture of the waiting Baronet, and Johnson made a comic parody of a passage in a work of Sir John's. There was not much harm in doing this; but fancy describing it all minutely, and their host reading it in print! They arrived very late, and found him "in no very good-humour." Boswell abused the bedrooms for their bareness and coldness: "My friend and I thought we should be more comfortable at the inn two miles farther on;" and so they set off. All this is printed about a respected private gentleman. Could anything be more offensive and ungracious? When these sudden resentments took possession of Boswell, he became quite uncontrollable, and would not listen to either reason or decency.

He was also entertained by Sir Allan McClean of Lochbuoy, and his sister—a pair of ancient lineage. Both were most kind and hospitable. Yet Bozzy, with a strange lack of what was due to a lady and to his host, describes the breakfast scene, where the laird's sister was pressing Johnson to cold sheep's heads, etc. "Sir Allan seemed displeased *at his sister's vulgarity*!" Incredible and

ungentlemanly! As this was printed only ten years later, the lady was probably alive, and read these disparaging remarks.

One of his casual notes shows how happily Bozzy could contrive to be offensive, though I really believe that he fancied he was saying something agreeable. Of Dr. Taylor, his host, he quotes a pleasant saying, adding the comment—“The only time I ever heard him say anything witty.” He merely meant that this was the only witty thing he had been lucky enough to hear. Yet it was a maladroit speech, and the reader thinks, “Here is a dull man in whose company Bozzy was for some weeks, and who had said only one lively thing.”

This worthy and portly Dr. Taylor could hardly have expected that his guest, whom he was entertaining so cordially, was all the time deliberately collecting evidence to bring home to him the charge that he was passing off another writer's sermons as his own. Bozzy took much pains to get to the bottom of this matter. “I have no doubt,” he says, “that a good many sermons were composed for Taylor by Johnson,” and then, spying among Johnson's papers: “At this time I found, upon his table, a part of one which he had newly begun to write; and *Concio pro Taylora* appears in one of his diaries. When to these circumstances we add the internal evidence from the power of

thinking and style, in the collection which the Reverend Mr. Hayes has published, with the significant title of ‘Sermons *left for publication* by the Reverend John Taylor, LL.D.,’ our conviction will be complete.” This agreeable stroke must have been read by Taylor.

To clinch the matter, in another part of his work Bozzy took care to lay down that he thought the passing off another’s work as your own was highly immoral: “I, however, would not have it thought that Dr. Taylor, though he could not write like Johnson (as, indeed, who could?), did not sometimes compose sermons as good as those which we generally have from very respectable divines. He showed me one with notes on the margin in Johnson’s handwriting; and I was present when he read another to Johnson, that he might have his opinion of it, and Johnson said it was ‘very well.’ *These, we may be sure, were not Johnson’s; for he was above little arts or tricks of deception.*” But who is referred to as being above “little arts,” “deception,” etc.—awkward words to introduce?

In a discussion Dr. Taylor admitted that the people were not much attracted to the then King, on which Boswell rather wantonly—for Taylor was still alive—suggests that Dr. Taylor was very ready to make this admission because his party was not in power!

And again: “Johnson told me that Taylor was

a very sensible, acute man, and had a strong mind ; that he had great activity in some respects, and yet such a sort of indolence that, if you should put a pebble upon his chimney-piece, you would find it there, in the same state, a year afterwards." This was hardly respectful.

"Johnson and Taylor," he says, "were so different from each other that I wondered at their preserving an intimacy." However, by inquiries and investigation he fancied he had found the reason. Taylor had told Johnson *that he was to be his heir*. Hence Johnson's *disinterested* attentions.

The joint disloyalty of both Johnson and Boswell to Langton, and their mutual harping on his supposed nearness, saving, and careless waste, with other failings, must have been a great shock to that excellent man when he read them in the book ; for, though unnamed, any friend would recognize him. "I have dined lately," wrote the Sage, "with poor dear ——. I do not think he goes on well. His table is rather coarse, and he has his children too much about him." Bozzy expands this censure : "*This very just remark will, I hope, be constantly held in remembrance by parents, who are in general too apt to indulge their own fond feelings at the expense of their friends. The common custom of introducing them after dinner is highly injudicious ; they should not be allowed to poison the moments of felicity by*

attracting the attention of the company." No doubt Mr. Boswell was often thus interfered with. And so he preaches to the general public on the subject.

Boswell's obligations to Langton were immense. The latter had helped him all through the work with anecdotes, reminiscences, etc. He had supplied him with sheaves of characteristic notes; he had been friendly to him during his London life. Yet Boswell contrived to insert throughout his book a number of disparaging, unpleasant things, which Langton must have read with surprise and dissatisfaction. Bozzy of course maintained that he was not accountable; he was merely reporting. But why this ill-nature? The reason, I believe, was that Boswell fancied it gave him importance; it made those "superior persons," who had patronized him and amused themselves at his expense, see that he was now their master and controller—that he was, as it were, Johnson's literary executor and censor. For some such reasons, every quarrel, every expression of dissatisfaction with Langton, is recorded with infinite pains. Boswell suppressed nothing save the name; but he described the person and his surroundings so minutely that there could be no mistake in identifying him. He set down all Johnson's criticisms on Langton's careless administration of his household; on Langton's impropriety in introducing religious topics for

discussion ; on his occasional penuriousness, as well as other slighting things. One would say he “had a spite” against this amiable man. On the other hand, he records many complimentary things.

With what feelings must Langton and his family have read the account of the “pickled mango” incident, meant to illustrate a mean and inconsistent economy. “I told him,” says our busybody, who in this respect suggests Tom Hill, the original of Paul Pry, “that at a gentleman’s house, where there was thought to be such extravagance or bad management that he was living much beyond his income, his lady had objected to the cutting of a pickled mango, and that I had taken an opportunity to inquire the price of such a mango, and found it was only two shillings. So here was a very poor saving indeed !” And he provoked Johnson to say that it was “the *blundering economy of narrow understanding*.” Imagine the good Langton reading this ! How could he forgive ?

This “mango story”—which Miss Hawkins recognized and said was not true—is a typical illustration of Boswell’s amazing insensibility to the claims of friendship, gratitude, or even decency. At the same time we must believe that he was utterly unconscious of what he was doing, and would have been astounded at any resentment being shown. We can hear him saying, as he always said when expostulated with, “Why, *I* have done nothing !

It was in my note-book. I merely copied it. 'The note-book was accountable.' There is something odd and uncanny in this misintelligence, as it would have struck any perfectly rational person that such a proceeding must dissolve a friendship on the spot. Another of his wild delusions was that by using the terms "a friend of ours, who had wasted his fortune, and thought by small savings to restore it," he could veil the personality of the victim. He might say, "Why, I have not named him; it is kept secret." Nothing of the kind. Detection was immediate. The incident was in the memory of Langton and his lady. The friends of course speculated when they read, and were helped by others in their guesses.

The most scandalous incident in this wanton treatment of the amiable Langton, who had been so good to him, was the scene, which Boswell described with such admirable humour, of the Doctor ridiculing Langton's having his will drawn up by Chambers, the lawyer. Here he presents his friend in the most malicious of attitudes, making Johnson speak of Langton's sisters, for whom he had affectionately provided in his will, as "three dowdies," and then proceed in the most comical fashion to picture the importance of signing the document. Langton must have been deeply outraged as he read, though he is disguised, as Boswell thought, as "one of our friends."

Yet how cleverly does Boswell analyze Johnson's feelings! "He now laughed immoderately, without any reason that we could perceive, at our friend's making his will: called him the testator, and added, 'I dare say he thinks he has done a mighty thing. He won't stay till he gets home to his seat in the country to produce this wonderful deed; he'll call up the landlord and read it to him,' etc."

I have always thought that Bozzy's capital story of his father and "Durham on the Galatians" betrayed a sort of mental casuistry that was rather significant. Pressed in argument, and challenged to name a Presbyterian theologian of reputation, he suddenly "and luckily," says Bozzy, recalled a title seen in a catalogue, "Durham on the Galatians," and boldly said: "Pray, sir, have you read Mr. Durham's *excellent* work on the Galatians?" "By this *lucky thought*," says his son admiringly, "he kept him at bay." Nevertheless, this was an elaborate falsehood and deception, and the son heartily approved of it, calling it "an instance of my father's address."

Little tricks and deceptions he was also fond of "playing off" on his great friend, such as that of the great Dilly dinner, which Johnson would not have approved had he known of it. Boswell, when planning their tour, used various devices to attract him. "It will forward the scheme," he wrote to Dr. Robertson, "if in your answer to this you express yourself concerning it with that power,

etc., which may be directed so as to operate shortly upon him." "The answer was quite as I could have wished." To another he wrote for something of the same kind, "that I may read it to the mighty Sage with proper emphasis." To another he sent a flattering note: "He talks of you with the same warmth that he did last year."

Perhaps the most elaborate specimen of these amusing *tracasseries* is his wholly unnecessary and intrusive management of the falling out between Johnson and Dr. Percy, which he thought to mend in a fashion of his own, but which only brought on his head the displeasure of the pair.

One can hardly repeat too often that Boswell's character is ever an instructive and amusing study. It is one general paradox. How inexplicable, for instance, seems his fancy for setting himself before the public in some degrading attitude, as a drunken man, a public laughing-stock—scenes which he described with as much interest as though he were dealing with another man! There is often a tendency to this in common society; but the moralist's caution should be remembered—never to tell a story against yourself. How was it that one so sharp in detecting another's foolishness could be so blind to his own? I fancy it was owing to his longing to be before the public in *some* shape or other; whether an unseemly or dignified one it mattered not, so that he was in

evidence. These scenes would cause talk at least, and his name would fly *per ora*. He, moreover, fancied that he had the better of the laughers, and that on appealing to his readers they would agree with him. Of the great *romancier*, the elder Dumas, his son protested that he was capable of getting behind his own carriage to persuade the public that he kept a negro servant! And lastly, as I have said, the scenes are so humorous and characteristic that no one, any more than he, would wish their omission. How strange that one so alive to foolishness should be so insensible to his own! I believe it was partly owing to his acute sense of humour and thorough enjoyment of a dramatic comic scene, which he could not bring himself to forego, even though it sacrificed his self-respect. Again he became the central figure, the object of all eyes, and the subject, also, of all the laughter. Further, by an odd delusion, he seemed to himself to gain in importance. One of these exhibitions is so truly humorous, and such a picture of Boswell's various weaknesses, that we are tempted to examine it a little minutely. He tells how he was dining with the Duke of Montrose, before "going on" to a party at Miss Monkton's, where he confesses, with a certain pride, he arrived intoxicated: "I had dined at the Duke of Montrose's with a very agreeable party, and *His Grace*, according to his usual custom, had

circulated the bottle freely. Lord Graham and I went together to Miss Monkton's, where I certainly was in extraordinary spirits and above all fear or awe. In the midst of a great number of persons of the first rank (amongst whom I recollect with confusion a noble lady of the most stately decorum), I placed myself next to Johnson, and, thinking myself now fully his match, talked to him in a loud, boisterous manner, desirous to let the company know how I could contend with Ajax. I particularly remember pressing him upon the value of the pleasures of the imagination, and, as an illustration of my argument, asking him: 'What, sir! supposing I were to fancy that the— (naming the most charming Duchess in His Majesty's dominions)— were in love with me, should I not be very happy?' My friend, with much address, evaded my interrogative, and kept me as quiet as possible." Next day he wrote the lady an apologetic "copy of verses," calling her "Maria," praising her "bright" eyes, and protesting he was "a victim to love and wine."

This scene—if not actually the best, one of the best—is admirably done. We are at the party, we see the company, and Bozzy lolling beside his friend, unconsciously talking loud, vociferating about a great Duchess being in love with him. Fancy the great ladies looking round with disgust and amusement, and asking, "Who is that horrid, low man?"

Imagine, too, how the Hon. Miss Monkton felt when her party was made so ridiculous!—for is not calling out names of private persons a serious breach of manners? We may conceive, too, what his noble host must have thought as he read, years later, that *he* was accountable for Bozzy's intoxication, owing to "his usual custom of circulating the bottle very freely." Now, there was no reproach in this—Boswell would have shrunk from such a thing—but there was a rather vulgar freedom. "Lord Graham and I went together," etc., is distinctly good. And all this is officially a life of that great man Johnson!

One of the most interesting figures of the period is, assuredly, the amiable and accomplished prelate Bishop Percy, presented to us as a dramatic figure by Boswell himself, though his treatment of his subject cannot be called handsome. But we know, see, and hear him perfectly. His book on the Northern Ballads has been the foundation of similar studies, and is one of the few books of his era that has held its ground and has been reprinted in sumptuous form. Boswell, as we have said, has pictured him most dramatically, but at the sacrifice of decorum and loyalty. Percy had the misfortune to *froisser* the sensitive chronicler, and thus incurred his petty resentment. Boswell's favourite plan was accordingly employed of holding him up to the public in somewhat ridiculous attitudes, and of depreciating him by what are called "pin-pricks." Bozzy himself

would expatiate on what should be the proper behaviour of a Bishop, so as to win the praise of the Doctor—though Boswell was not exactly an authority on such matters—yet he has contrived to furnish a disparaging portrait of a somewhat frivolous personage which no well-intended efforts will ever efface. The real Bishop of Dromore will for all time be Boswell's Bishop of Dromore, and no other.* What could exceed the scene in which he made the worthy Dr. Percy figure? At a dinner-party Johnson had rather roughly—if not rudely—assailed the Bishop, to the latter's great mortification, as there was present an intimate friend of the Duke of Northumberland, head of the House of Percy, who, he had hoped, would carry a glowing account of his intimacy with the Great Cham. He confided his distress to Boswell, who at once planned a device for setting things straight. He would get Johnson to write to him (Boswell) a sort of testimonial letter in favour of the Bishop, and this he would read aloud at a dinner in presence of the Duke's friend; and thus, he said complacently, the whole injurious impression of Johnson's attack on Dr. Percy would be removed. Johnson good-humouredly agreed, but laughed and "*rubbed it in.*" "This comes of stratagem," he said. "*Had he only*

* There has recently appeared a sort of official biography, which, however, excited little or no attention, and has not in the least disturbed the Boswellian account.

told me he wished to show to advantage before that gentleman——” How mortifying for the Bishop! Bozzy then eagerly proposed his crafty plot, suggesting that he (B.) should write to Johnson, and that the latter should compose in reply (*ad hoc*) a handsome testimonial to the Bishop. And, as Lord Percy was to be at a certain dinner-party, Bozzy was to read this letter aloud. What, however, will be thought of his telling the whole business in print, to the horror and indignation of the Bishop; who was thus represented as joining in the trick to recover his position and curry favour with the Duke? But Bozzy did not care. He had proved that he held all the strings in his hand, and could work his chief like some puppet. One could almost hear Dr. Percy groaning as he read of the awkward figure his foolish friend made him cut. As Boswell, indeed, put it in his first edition, “Johnson’s letter was studiously framed to place Dr. Percy’s merit in the fairest point of view.” Percy was so annoyed at this, as well as at other things set down to him, that it is clear he compelled changes to be made, and these offensive words were left out. Nothing was more foolish. The gentleman must have seen through the trick, and, we may be sure, did not fail exactly to describe the original scene when the Bishop was so unpleasantly set down.

There is a note to this little *tracasserie* added in the second edition. It seems at first sight a

bit of ordinary comment, for those who cannot "read between the lines": "Though the Bishop of Dromore kindly answered the letter which I wrote to him relative to Dr. Johnson's early history,* yet in justice to him *I think it proper to add* that the account of the foregoing conversation and the subsequent transaction, as well as of some other conversations in which he is mentioned, were given to the public without previous communication with his lordship."

The ordinary reader would pass this by as a cautious limitation. But it was one of Bozzy's crafty little devices for shielding himself; and it is clear that this rather humiliating apology, though it does not profess to be one, was dictated by the indignant Bishop. For Boswell had conveyed the impression that the latter was *particeps* in the transaction and enjoyed it. The Bishop explains that it was a violation of confidence, and that had he known of it beforehand he would have interdicted any publication; and he conveys that Boswell had behaved improperly in not submitting so confidential an incident to him. It is amusing to see how airily Boswell carries it off, as though he were gener-

* I may be allowed to refer the reader who is curious about these matters to my reprint of the first edition of Boswell's "Johnson," in which the variations of later editions are marked and explained. I may just say that it is a work full of interest for those who would understand Boswell's true character.

ously conceding: "Yet in justice to him I think it proper to add," etc. But there is no attempt at flouting him, for, as in the case of Dr. Beattie, Dr. Percy was not one to be trifled with. And this little matter leads us to another.*

Even to remonstrate against unfair treatment became a new offence, to be chastised with more ridicule. Such was the case of the amiable Dr. Beattie, of whom Johnson, with coarse humour, wrote "he had sunk upon us, that he was a married man, and had been passing himself off as a bachelor." This was unpleasant reading for one high in favour at Court, a popular divine and a poet. It was written in a private letter, certainly not intended to be published. Poor Beattie wrote a piteous remonstrance, saying that the charge was quite untrue, that he had introduced his wife

* Almost at the same time, Boswell, from spite or infatuation, led on Johnson to some broad ridicule of the Bishop, laughing obstreperously and, it must be said, unmeaningly at his doings. He told Johnson that he heard that Percy was writing a history of the grey wolf in England. "The wolf? Why the wolf? Why does he not write of the Grey Rat—the Hanover Rat, as it is called?" This, of course, was suggested by the Bishop's patronage of Grainger's Rats. "I should like to see 'The History of the Grey Rat, by Thomas Percy, D.D., Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty'" (laughing immoderately). Boswell said he was afraid a Court chaplain could not decently write of the Grey Rat. All this was very improper and offensive to put in print, and this whole "Rat passage" must have thrown ridicule on the good Bishop.

everywhere. It was, indeed, no more than one of Johnson's jests. Beattie insisted that his letter should be inserted in the next edition.

Another example. To the amiable Reynolds, Boswell was under deep and many obligations. He had even "stood up" for him to Johnson. "Mr. Boswell has said it as correctly as it could be." He had helped him in his labours, furnished him with materials, yet, because he had declined for good reason to point out what share Johnson had taken in writing his "addresses," he turns on him unkindly, and sets down a very unpardonable insinuation as a reason for the refusal.

"Some of these, the persons who were favoured with them, are unwilling it should be mentioned, from a too anxious apprehension, as I think, that they might be suspected of having received larger assistance." Boswell complained to Malone, mentioning Sir Joshua as having had this objection. He declares that the painter first gave his consent, and then changed his mind. The leaf had to be cancelled. All this was awkward and inconvenient. But he knew how to punish his friend, who had applied to himself the general statement. He must have been seriously annoyed to find so unworthy a motive imputed to him.

On another occasion, mentioning that Sir Joshua would not join a tavern club that Johnson had founded, Bozzy said: "It did not *suit* Sir Joshua

to be of this club." Now, there is something not very tactful in this awkward word, which suggests some sort of disparagement of the founder, his friend. It is probable that Sir Joshua had not time to frequent such a club, and had excused himself.

Bozzy's treatment of his friends and acquaintances is almost invariably "superior," often contemptuous and depreciatory. He often contrives by a tactless phrase to convey that the person was a poorish or inferior being. It seemed never to occur to him that he was under various obligations to these people, or that he was doing anything improper. He was seated in his judicial chair, recording Johnsoniana, and bound to suppress nothing. The Professors of the various Scotch Universities had treated him hospitably; yet he could not resist speaking lightly of them, or making disparaging remarks as to their learning. If one was a little silent, the reason was that he was afraid to commit himself before Johnson. He indulged in sneers, too. All this was owing to his assured air of superiority.

In examining this interesting question, we must always take into account Boswell's curious taste for secret and crafty methods in preference to straightforward courses. He relished carrying out a piece of business in tortuous fashion, because it raised his opinion of his own cleverness. He particularly enjoyed "playing" on the Doctor in this way, "turning him round his finger," as it were. He

might be saying to himself all the time, "This great, wise man cannot see through my little tricks." We think again of Sir Walter's acute remark as to his being the monkey on Johnson's shoulders.

How many instances does he furnish in his book of these little devices, even recording them with pride! Witness this specimen:

At Welwyn, Boswell wishes to contrive a meeting with the son of the poet Young. "Here *some address was requisite*," he tells us, for he did not know Mr. Young, and if he had suggested such a meeting Johnson would have "checked his wish" or been offended. That is, it would have been disagreeable to Johnson. "I here *concerted* with Mr. Dilly that I should *steal away*, and try what *reception I could procure* from Mr. Young; *if unfavourable, nothing was to be said*, but if agreeable, I should return. He accordingly repaired to Mr. Young, and told him that the reason for his calling was "a wish to see his place." The other asked him to tea, when Bozzy said he had just come from London with Dr. Johnson, and must go back to join him at tea. The other ventured to hope that the Doctor would come and join him. "Availing myself of this opening," he said he would go and fetch him. Having been thus successful, he went back and told Johnson. "Luckily, *he made no inquiry* how this invitation had arisen."

Here Johnson is second. The hero-manager, arranger of all things, is the great Mr. Boswell. "What a clever man!" thinks the reader, as he does on a hundred other occasions.

It will be seen that this account, which anyone but Bozzy would have been ashamed to confide to his readers, in nearly every line offers some trifling deception. But the worst thing is the pride that our author seems to take in it all, as though it were a wonderful piece of cleverness.

In connection with this taste for small deceptions, here is a comic instance of Bozzy's autocratic and controlling spirit. Having simply mentioned that "Tom Tyers" knew Johnson, he proceeds to tell us all about him in the fullest detail—how he was the founder of Vauxhall Gardens, of which he gives a sketch: all which, of course, belongs to Boswell's personal memoirs, and is therefore in its right place. The details are not very *à propos*; but we must look below. Tom Tyers had been guilty of writing an account of the Doctor, his sayings and doings, and of publishing his little volume in advance of Boswell. The book is written very naturally, and contains some curious anecdotes, so Boswell must give Tyers a proper set-down. "He abounded in anecdote, but was not sufficiently attentive to accuracy, and I therefore cannot venture to avail myself much of a biographic sketch of Johnson's which he published, *being one of the many various persons ambitious of*

appending their names to that of my illustrious friend. The sketch is, however, an entertaining little collection of fragments." Tom could not have been pleased with this artful mixture of praise and condemnation. He censured him, too, for raising the price of admission to two shillings. "I cannot approve of this," he says bluntly. He objects to the honest commonalty being excluded. "An attempt to abolish the shilling gallery at the playhouse has been properly counteracted." But it is a blend of praise and contemptuous depreciation which would leave on the reader the impression that Tom was "a futile creature," and not to be attended to as a solemn authority. Again, we find ourselves wondering how this *mélange*—Vauxhall Gardens, the price of the tickets, and his disapproval of their being raised—has to do with Johnson's biography; though it certainly has to do with Boswell's.

But there is one stroke at poor Mrs. Thrale which exceeds the rest for its artful malice. She had printed a letter of Johnson's without giving her reply, of which Boswell had somehow got possession. He introduces it thus maliciously: "It will amuse the readers, probably, more than those well-written *but studied epistles* which she has inserted in her collection." The insinuation is, that she had here no opportunity of altering and embellishing or rewriting.

Johnson had said of Dr. Campbell that he was

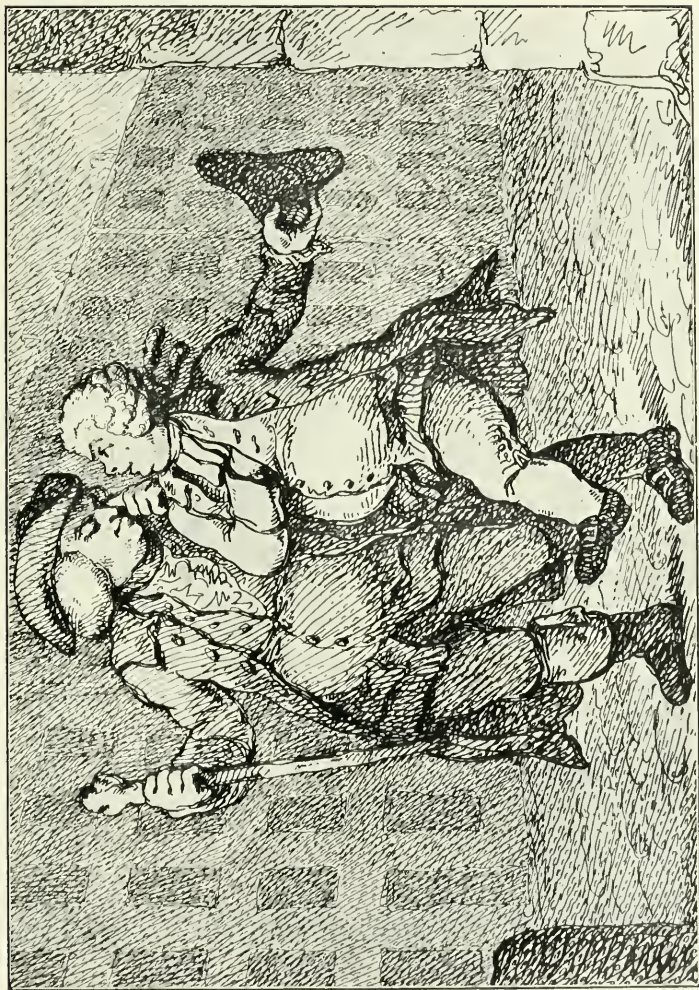
afraid he had not been in a church for many years, on which Bozzy makes some very droll remarks in his character of "Patron of Orthodoxy." "I am inclined to think that he was misinformed as to this circumstance. I own I am jealous for my worthy friend Dr. John Campbell. For though Milton could without remorse absent himself from public worship, I cannot. On the contrary, I have the same habitual impressions upon my mind with those of a truly venerable Judge, who said to Mr. Langton: 'Friend Langton, if I have not been at church on Sunday, I do not feel myself easy.' Dr. Campbell was a sincerely religious man. Lord Macartney, who is eminent for his variety of knowledge and attention to men of talents, and knew him well, told me that when he called on him one morning, he found him reading a chapter in the Greek New Testament." A proper test—just as Bozzy himself might be found reading Ogden.

Boswell's attacks on persons he excessively disliked—such as Gibbon, who "poisoned the Club to him"—were as indecent as they were ungentlemanly. Recording that Johnson was made Professor of Literature at the Royal Academy, he adds: "In which place he has been succeeded by Bennet Langton, Esq. When that truly religious gentleman was elected to this honorary professorship at the same time that Edward Gibbon, Esq., noted for introducing a kind of sneering infidelity into his

historical writings, was elected Professor in Ancient History in the room of Dr. Goldsmith, I observed that it brought to my mind ‘Wicked Will Whiston and good Mr. Ditton.’ I am now also of that admirable institution as Secretary for Foreign Correspondence, by the favour of the Academicians and the approbation of the Sovereign.”*

Here is a typical instance of Boswell’s strange “blend” of compliment with some “nasty” strokes, as though the first was enforced, and had to be balanced by something in the other direction. His curious soul seemed always thus subject to turns and shifts, which he expressed without restraint. Having mentioned “Dr. Watson’s Chemical Essays,” it occurred to him that he had something to say about this person, with the result of furnishing an odd note, compounded of praise and censure, and sufficient to make the person feel uncomfortable. The Bishop might have been gratified by reading of the poverty of his diocese, but next moment came an odd remark: “His lordship has written *with*

* Some remarks on Shakespeare appeared in an Edinburgh literary journal, in which the world ventured to object to Johnson’s line, “Panting time,” etc. Says Boswell: “Written, I should suppose, by a very young man, though *called* reverend, who speaks with presumptuous petulance of the first literary character of his age. Amidst a cloudy confusion of words,” etc. “*The learned society under whose patronage such gabble is ushered into the world would do well to offer a premium to anyone who will discover its meaning.*” Thus did one author call another up to his judgment-seat and claim the right to judge!



WALKING UP THE HIGH STREET, EDINBURGH.

“Mr. Johnson and I walked arm-in-arm up the High Street to my home in James Court.”—*Boswell's Journal*.



much zeal to show the propriety of equalizing the revenues of bishoprics." This might be taken as slightly sarcastic, as though the Bishop treated a general question for his own personal interests. Then follows with no *à propos* an announcement: "He has informed me that he has destroyed all his chemical papers." This could not have pleased the Bishop, who would not have cared to have it publicly known, though he had informed Bozzy of the fact privately. It *committed* him, exposed him to questioning, etc.—in fact, must have made him a little uncomfortable. Boswell winds up with a very ill-natured and uncalled-for remark, to the effect that friends of the constitution, "assailed" on every side by innovations, "would have less regretted the suppression of some of his lordship's other writings."

Boswell's fashion of fixing by degrees, as it were, and without appeal, the status of anyone brought before him, revising and degrading where he found a disparaging circumstance, is shown in the case of Anna Maria Williams. The sincerity and conscientiousness of his severity is, however, beyond question. In his first edition he had spoken of her warmly as "an amiable, elegant, and accomplished young lady." But after the French Revolution she had to be *retried* before him. "In the first edition of my work the epithet *amiable* was given. *I was sorry to be obliged to strike it out,*

but I could not suffer it to remain after this young lady had written in favour of the French anarchy, and had (as I have been informed on good authority) walked without horror over the ground at the Tuileries when it was strewed with the naked bodies of the Swiss, who had defended the monarch against a crew of ruffians." Bozzy was trying to be as lenient to the prisoner as was consistent with his position as judge, and sentenced her to forfeit his complimentary term of "amiable."

Nothing is more interesting than to trace the windings and entanglements of poor Bozzy's strange character. After a little practice we can do it successfully. We are often surprised by an unexpected venomous stroke in return for some favour.

When at Lichfield, Johnson coolly walked away to dine with Mrs. Gastrel at Stowhill, leaving his friend to find a dinner where he could, "without any apology. I wondered at this want of that facility of manners from which a man has no difficulty in carrying a friend to a house where he is intimate; I felt it very unpleasant to be thus left in solitude in a country town, where I was an entire stranger, and began to think myself unkindly deserted." Thus it rankled. This carrying a guest to a friend without invitation was actually a practice with him, and he once thus brought a couple of gentlemen, Colonel Stopford and another, to breakfast in Bolt Court under such free and

easy conditions. But he was soon relieved, for Mrs. Gastrel kindly sent him an invitation at Johnson's request. He ought to have been obliged to both, above all to the lady, but mark what followed: "I was not informed till afterwards that Mrs. Gastrel's husband was the clergyman who, while he lived at Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was proprietor of Shakespeare's garden, with Gothic barbarity cut down his mulberry-tree, and, as Dr. Johnson told me, did it to vex his neighbours. *His lady, I have reason to believe on the same authority, participated in the guilt of what the enthusiasts of our immortal bard deem almost a species of sacrilege.*"

Now, how morbid was all this! First his resentment at being neglected, though he did not know the lady, as well as the absurd theory that an invited guest was entitled to bring a friend. Still, it was Johnson that got him the invitation; he ought to have been asked on his own claims. He seems to say that, had he at the time known of the mulberry-tree outrage, he might not have gone. The real meaning of all this was that he had not forgiven the lady the affront she had put upon him by not asking him on his merits and reputation: she must have known of his being in the town. It had rankled ever since.

Now, I have gone at length into this department of Bozzy's character because it shows so clearly

how he was dominated by his own feelings and passions, and to such an extent that they were beyond his control. As he dwelt on his fancied wrongs, his importance swelled and swelled, he lost all restraint, forgot Johnson, his life and doings, in the one purpose of laying all his grievances before the public, and exposing and chastising those who had offended him. This he looked on as an element in his own important life, and, as the feeling grew on him that here was a rare opportunity for righting himself with society, his book gradually expanded under his hands into a full apologia or autobiography.

It is all the time impossible to suppose that the worthy Boswell was malignant by nature. One would be inclined to think that it was a habit to which he had become accustomed. He found it easier and more enjoyable to "pick holes," as it is called, than to see merits, and his Paul Pry methods put him in possession of everyone's mistakes and failings. He thus became superior, as he always liked to be.

Now, does it not curiously support the theory set forth in these pages, that at this moment we have grown so utterly entangled in Mr. Boswell's movements, adventures, feelings, hostile and other, as to have become utterly oblivious of the great man whose course and character we are assumed to be following and celebrating? It is altogether Mr.

Boswell's character and feelings that wholly engross our attention. Take this Gastrel incident. Johnson's share in it seems trivial enough, though it was a good-natured act. But what a hero becomes his friend! how important for himself and for the reader! What a crowd of personal incident—his resentment, etc.—and then his ungenerous attack on the lady! Can there be doubt as to who was the important personage in the episode?

What is presented here gives but a tithe of this strange and wondrous exhibition of animosity. It is really phenomenal. He most excels in gathering together piquant stories and bits of gossip, so as to ingeniously depreciate.

I know how invidious, and perhaps ungenerous, all this will seem; but it is absolutely necessary to prove the case.

His treatment of Mrs. Thrale I need not go into, as it is so familiar; but it is full of choice malice. What, however, are little known are the attacks on other ladies—on Miss Primrose, Miss Seward, and others.*

His frantic loathing of poor Sir John Hawkins, his studied revilings of him, seem all but unmatched in literary history. There is nothing like it—and it is all done with such malicious art.

* They will be found scattered through the *Scots Magazine* and other "monthlies." Abstracts of them are given in my *Life of Boswell*.

The Knight, however, had wounded him in many places. What makes it worse is, that all the time he cultivated a seeming intimacy, a hypocritical friendship—dining and breakfasting with him, while he was actually writing down some libellous description.

He would write to his friend Temple that he had breakfasted with Hawkins: that he believed “he was a good man, but rather ‘mean’ in his entertainment for a person of his position.” However, they got “into social converse this winter.” But shortly after we find him writing to Temple: “Pray by return of post help me with a word. In censuring Sir J. Hawkins’s book, I say, ‘There is throughout the whole of it a dark, uncharitable *cast*,’ which puts the most unfavourable construction on my illustrious friend’s conduct. Malone will have *malignancy* for *cast*. Is not that too strong?”

I have always thought that Boswell’s animosity to Hawkins was unique, an almost incredible specimen, revealed as it was openly to the public, without shame—quite a “human document” in that line. In a long course of reading—memoirs, letters, and the like—I have never met anything to match it. In his case, Boswell’s malignancy was so thorough and so absorbed him, that he threw away all restraint and decency, and did not care if all the world knew that what he

said was dictated by scorn, contempt, and the bitterest hatred. It is terrible evidence of such feelings when it leads to unscrupulous distortion of facts. How are we to account for it? Boswell's was a decent, rather affectionate disposition; but anyone who interfered with or hindered his plans he considered to be doing so of set purpose to injure him. His hatred carried him so far that he did not care what people said or thought of his monstrous doings.

His epitome of the Knight's career is really unmatched for its venom: "Since my work was announced, several Lives and Memoirs of Dr. Johnson have been published, the most voluminous of which is one compiled for the booksellers of London by Sir John Hawkins, Knight, a man whom, during my long intimacy with Dr. Johnson, *I never saw in his company, I think, but once, and I am sure not above twice.* Johnson *might* have esteemed him for his decent, religious demeanour, and his knowledge of books and literary history; but from the rigid formality of his manners it is evident that they never could have lived together with companionable ease and familiarity; nor had Sir John Hawkins that nice perception which was necessary to mark the finer and less obvious parts of Johnson's character. His being appointed one of his executors gave him an opportunity of *taking possession of such fragments of a diary and*

other papers as were left ; of which, before delivering them up to the residuary legatee, whose property they were, *he endeavoured to extract the substance*. In this he has *not been very successful, as I have found* upon a perusal of those papers, which have been since transferred to me. Sir John Hawkins's *ponderous labours*, I must acknowledge, exhibit a *farrago*, of which a considerable portion is not devoid of entertainment to the lovers of *literary gossiping*; but besides its being swelled out with long unnecessary extracts from various works (even one of several leaves from Osborne's Harleian Catalogue, and those not compiled by Johnson, but by Oldys), a very small part of it relates to the person who is the subject of the book ; and in that there is *such an inaccuracy* in the statement of facts as in so solemn an author is hardly excusable, and certainly makes his narrative very unsatisfactory. But what is still worse, there is throughout the whole of it a *dark, uncharitable cast*. . . .

“The greatest part of this book was written while Sir John Hawkins was alive ; and I avow that one object of my strictures was to make him feel some compunction for his illiberal treatment of Dr. Johnson. Since his decease I have suppressed several of my remarks upon his work. But though I would not ‘war with the dead’ *offensively*, I think it necessary to be strenuous in *defence* of my

illustrious friend, which I cannot be without strong animadversions upon a writer who has greatly injured him. Let me add that, though I doubt I should not have been very prompt to gratify Sir John Hawkins with any compliment in his lifetime, I do now frankly acknowledge that, in my opinion, his volume, however inadequate and improper as a Life of Dr. Johnson, and however discredited by unpardonable inaccuracies in other respects, contains a collection of curious anecdotes and observations, which few men but its author could have brought together."

The malice of all this is extraordinary. It is an accumulation of libellous things. There is nothing anywhere like this for malice, so skilfully put together. It seems to have grown and accumulated in his bosom, till on the news of Hawkins's death it burst forth. Boswell says, indeed, that he would have published his remarks all the same had Hawkins lived, for he wished to punish him for his "illiberal strictures" on Johnson—yet another misrepresentation. One may doubt, however, whether, considering their new intimacy, he would have dared to do this.

He is generally wrong in his facts, just as he is in his abuse of Hawkins and his statement as to Garrick's connection with the Club. By a not unnatural error, the Knight stated that Garrick was never admitted a member; this, however, was not

the case, though pretty near it. Garrick had announced that he liked the idea of the Club, and would join it. Johnson resented this declaration, and announced that he would "black-bean" him, with offensive remarks on his calling as a player. Boswell declares that he was "soon after" admitted. Mrs. Thrale also gives an account of Dr. Johnson's hostility and contempt, and of his determination not to admit the actor. Now, does it not come very near to supporting Hawkins's statement, when we find that, instead of its being "soon after" (1764), it was *nine years* before so distinguished a man as the actor was allowed to enter?

When Johnson was dying and his legs were being scarified, thinking the surgeons did not cut deep enough, he boldly used a pair of scissors to enlarge the incision, so as to let the water escape. But hear Boswell: "This bold experiment Sir J. Hawkins has related in such a manner as to suggest a charge of intentionally hastening his end; a charge so very inconsistent with his character, in every respect, that it is injurious even to refute it," etc. This will seem a distortion of the facts when we read that Hawkins said just the contrary.

It is to his credit that he was elected to the Literary Club—no mean testimonial. But when describing its foundation members Boswell stops a moment to speak of his enemy: "Sir John Hawkins

represents himself as a *seceder* from this society, and assigns as the reason of his *withdrawing* himself from it, that its late hours were inconsistent with his domestic arrangements. In this he is not accurate; for the fact was, that he one evening attacked Mr. Burke in so rude a manner that all the company testified their displeasure, and at their next meeting his reception was such that he never came again." This story he calls "not accurate," though he means that it is an untruth. How natural that this grave, rather pedantic, matter-of-fact personage should feel himself out of place among these lively beings! We are told that he objected to pay for a supper of which he did not partake. This would not have made him unpopular. Why should we not accept the reason given by Hawkins himself?

The Knight explained very candidly that they seldom met till nine, the committee business taking till ten; supper was not over till eleven, at which time his servants "came for him; he could not wait up without disturbance of his family." He also says that he disapproved of the class of "exceptionable" persons they had begun to admit. He was probably thinking of Gibbon, and perhaps of Boswell himself, and it is likely enough that he had a hot argument with Burke on this point. It may have been that the members showed their displeasure, but not to the extent of *driving* him from

the Club. Besides, Sir John was not the man to yield to that sort of pressure. He was a hard-headed lawyer, full of business, and probably found these "pleasant vices" rather inconvenient and unsuitable. It was scarcely proper, too, in Bozzy to reveal the secrets of the prison-house, and open the affairs of private gentlemen to the public.

On the building of Blackfriars Bridge Sir John furnishes some rather abstruse architectural theorems, yet which are intelligent and interesting. They were quite *à propos*, as Johnson had taken a deep interest in the "elliptical arch question," etc. But Bozzy is more than usually scurrilous on the occasion. (True, the Knight was dead.)

"Sir John Hawkins has given a long detail of it, in *that manner vulgarly, but significantly, called rigmarole*; in which, amidst an ostentatious exhibition of arts and artists, he talks of 'proportions of a column being taken from that of the human figure, and *adjusted by Nature*—masculine and feminine—in a man *sesquioctave* of the head, and in a woman *sesquinonal*'; nor has he failed to introduce *a jargon of musical terms*, which do not seem much to correspond with the subject, *but serve to make up the heterogeneous mass. To follow the knight through all this would be a useless fatigue to myself, and not a little disgusting to my readers.* I shall therefore only make a few remarks upon his statement."

Hawkins mentions that Johnson really valued him, and allowed him to accompany him in a journey to the Hebrides, etc. Who could see offence here? It gives him credit—"one that highly valued him." The offence lay in calling him "Mr. James Boswell." "See how he speaks of me," the latter would write to his friends. As Miss Hawkins explained, it ought to have been "the celebrated Mr. Boswell," the "well-known Mr. Boswell"; but plain "Mr. James Boswell!" Hawkins was a matter-of-fact man with a legal mind; he simply set down the fact. But Bozzy's hatred grew and grew. Even at starting he paid him off for that "Mr. James Boswell." Enumerating the members of the Ivy Lane Club, he calls him "*Mr. John Hawkins, an attorney*"—an amusing, *literal* retort—with a note: "He was afterwards for several years Chairman of the Middlesex Justices, and, upon his presenting an address to the King, *accepted the usual offer of knighthood*. He is the author of 'A History of Musick,' in five volumes in quarto. By assiduous attendance upon Johnson in his last illness, he obtained the office of one of his executors; in consequence of which the booksellers of London employed him to publish an edition of Dr. Johnson's works, and to write his Life."

Almost every word here is barbed. "A common City justice"—"accepted the usual offer." The last sentence is untrue *in omnibus*. He did not obtain

the executorship by "assiduous attendance." He came as a friend and man of business, got Johnson to make a will, and was kind and useful. But was not Bozzy also "assiduously attentive"? "*In consequence of which*" the editing and the biography came to him. But Boswell could not know what prompted the booksellers, except that Sir John seemed a fit and suitable person. Presently, when the Knight falls into a mistake, he does so "with solemn inaccuracy"—a happy phrase.

Apart from this, Boswell's statements of facts are false and misleading. He says that Sir John had no intimacy with Johnson, for the personal reason that he (Boswell) had not seen him more than twice in Johnson's company. The truth was, he was an intimate of Johnson's, and must have met him at Cave's, at "the Club," and at the Essex Head, for which Johnson selected him. Indeed, his attendance at Johnson's deathbed, and preparing his will, were matters only in the province of an intimate friend.

That this account has "the dark, uncharitable cast" which Bozzy attributed to Hawkins, and was all but libellous, is evident from even the most meagre accounts given in the cyclopædias. Boswell showed him as an obscure scheming adventurer who had "got on" by mean and tortuous ways, the fact being that he was a highly respectable personage and his career notable. Almost every

incident in his life his enemy has contrived to distort.

He was the son of a carpenter, raised himself to be a solicitor, wrote for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, studied music with success, and compiled a very elaborate history of the science. His attorney's work prospered; he married a fortune, inherited another, and disposed of his business advantageously. He was admitted to the society of Walpole, Garrick, and others of the *literati*. He published useful law tracts, was made a magistrate, and became highly popular with his colleagues, who made him their chairman. He was active in suppressing riots and disorders, and he was finally knighted. This is surely a respectable record, and no one could suppose that it was written of the person whom Bozzy so defamed.

A vast number of other illustrations of this *vili-pending* system could be quoted; what has been given is, however, I think, convincing. But what could be expected when he has not spared his chief? It will be said that this is all inconsistent with the abundant and most exuberant praises which are found all through the volumes, but these chiefly refer to Johnson's character. Further, Boswell did not mind appearing inconsistent. He had his private purpose in correcting his friends' errors, which was to exalt himself; and placing himself on this elevation, he could afford to praise. And even as to Johnson's

character, which he so revered, how many things were there which need not have been revealed! Such are the ferocious displays of ill-temper, etc. Boszy felt that where he was thus and so often assailed, his best vindication was to let his friend exhibit himself to the public, who were expected to think, "How nobly patient, how sweet-tempered and forbearing, is this Mr. Boswell!" The question for the reader is, of course, whether this clever contrivance was craftily devised for Boswell's own purposes.

If he found his great book a convenient vehicle for ventilating his dislikes, he found it no less valuable for showing his partialities for those whom he revered, admired, or looked to for something. All the lavish compliments dispersed through the book—mostly *à propos des bottes*—were introduced with what is called "an eye to business." For the moment he is perpetually setting aside the duties of his biography to bring in lavish praise of some noble person from whom he had expectations. He, indeed, scarcely mentions a lord, with whom he may have had merely a bowing acquaintance, without some clumsily-turned compliment. This was not likely to advance his cause, for such exalted personages do not much relish, if they are not actually affronted by, the eulogiums of a comparative stranger. It may be accepted as certain that for every such effort a motive can be detected. We may take as a happy illustration

his introduction of Sir Michael le Fleming. Boswell had declared that Greenwich Park was not to be compared with Fleet Street. “*Let me shelter myself under the authority* of a very fashionable baronet in the brilliant world, who declared that he preferred the smell of a flambeau at the playhouse to the fragrance of a May evening in the country.” Not to put his readers in suspense, Bozzy, in a note, elaborately reveals the name of this personage: “My friend Sir Michael le Fleming, of Rydal in Westmoreland. This gentleman, with all his experience of sprightly and elegant life, *inherits with the beautiful family domain* no inconsiderable share of that love of literature which distinguished *his venerable grandfather*, the Bishop of Carlisle. He one day observed to me of Dr. Johnson, *in a felicity* of phrase: ‘There is a blunt dignity about him on every occasion.’” Now, it is easy to see that these quoted sayings are not of very striking mark, and it is necessary to cast about a little to find out *why* Bozzy was so admiring of one who inherited “with the beautiful family domain” a literary taste. I find that Sir Michael was one of the Lowthers’ pocket borough members; and at that time Bozzy was moving heaven and earth to get the Lowthers to nominate him also. There were two others of these Lowther members, intimates also of Sir Michael, and Bozzy was naturally eager to secure

the favour of the trio. But he was destined to fail in his Parliamentary attempt.

Among the "patrons" to whom Bozzy was looking for preferment was the celebrated Dundas, whom he introduces whenever he can, with compliments—as in the Case of the Negro: "I cannot too highly praise his speech. Mr. Dundas's Scottish accent, which has been so often in vain obtruded as an objection to his powerful abilities in Parliament, was no disadvantage to him here."

I think that we may reasonably account for the "high" society in which Boswell figured, and for the number of noble lords and ladies and distinguished men who invited him to their houses. It was owing to his known intimacy with the Doctor. It soon came to be thought that the latter would not be pleased if his "personal attendant" or aide-de-camp were omitted. Having secured his footing, Boswell exerted himself to "bring out" his friend, and so attract the other guests.

There is one delightful, *impayable* passage of the biographical sort, which is exceedingly amusing. In various places he names his different early patrons—noblemen all—Loudouns, Eglintons, MountstUARTS, Lowthers, etc. Lord Somerville, who had known Pope, was another. Here he pauses, and says impressively: "Let me here express my grateful remembrance of Lord Somerville's *kindness to me at a very early period.* *He was the first person of*

high rank that took particular notice of me in the way most flattering to a young man fondly ambitious of being distinguished for his literary talents; and by the honour of his encouragement made me think well of myself and aspire to deserve it better. Never shall I forget the hours I enjoyed with him at his apartments in the Royal Palace of Holyrood House, and at his seat near Edinburgh, which he himself had formed with an elegant taste."

Again we wonder, can this be Johnson's life or Boswell's own?

It is always amusing to see how he unconsciously lets escape for our benefit so many secret traits of his character. He speaks of "making approaches to the acquaintances of the great, and of the danger of being mortified by rejections." How comic was this! As though it were a correct, habitual thing in society to try and "get to know" as many great personages as possible, and even encounter snubs and repulses in so doing. He tells us: "I am generally for trying: Nothing venture, etc." In fact, he soon got a regular reputation for thus forcing himself on notable persons.

Once he brought to Bolt Court a great personage, "the Honourable and Reverend William Stuart, son of the Earl of Bute, whom he compliments as "a gentleman truly worthy of being known to Johnson; being, with all the advantages of high birth, learning, travel, and elegant manners, an

exemplary parish priest in every respect." Bozzy had expectations from his noble family.

But Bozzy was literally consumed with a passion for knowing these great folk, and he knew many—Dukes, Marquises, etc. On the Hebridean tour it is to be suspected that, without acquaintance, he halted before various noble mansions, that he might send in word that he had with him the great Doctor, leave his card, etc. A list of his aristocratic acquaintances could be made out from his books.

His praise, both in text and notes, of Mr. Vilette, the Ordinary of Newgate, is very elaborate and emphatic. "Let me observe in justice to Mr. Vilette, who has been Ordinary for no less than eighteen years, in the course of which he has attended many hundreds of wretched criminals, that his earnest and humane exhortations have been very effectual. His extraordinary diligence is highly praiseworthy, and merits a distinguished reward. I trust that the *City of London*, now happily in unison with the *Court*, will have the justice and generosity to obtain preferment for this reverend gentleman, now a worthy old servant of *that magnificent Corporation*."

This mixture of compliment and recommendation had in it more than meets the eye. Bozzy does not let us know that he was under serious obligation to this gentleman, whom he strove to repay by

this profitless praise. Sir Walter Scott learned that he was fond of attending on capital punishments, and that "he used to attend the prisoners on the day before execution to make them laugh by dint of buffoonery, in which he was not unfrequently successful!" He was allowed to sit in the cart with some. These privileges he owed to Vilette and Akerman the Governor.

The basis of his whole social life was "to get to know people," and those of high rank and importance by preference. For this he strove and contrived and schemed. However slight the connection, he had always a misty idea that he might make people useful to him. He dreamed about their getting him forward in some way or other; and when he came to write his book, he took care to put into it accounts of his relations with all the personages he knew. As he gibbeted those whom he disliked or who had offended him, he could in his turn repay with compliments and praises those whom he regarded with favour, or who had conferred any little obligation on him. These testimonials were generally of an exaggerated kind, and must have embarrassed the recipients, especially in the case of noble persons, who must have thought them too free.

Speaking of Scots acquiring the English accent, he tells us—"so successful were Mr. Wedderburne's instructors, and his own unabating endeavours, that

he got rid of the coarse part of the Scotch accent, retaining only as much of the 'native wood-note wild' as to mark his country; *which, if any Scotchman should affect to forget, I should heartily despise him.* . . . Hence his distinguished oratory, which he exerted in his own country as an advocate in the Court of Session, and a ruling elder of the *Kirk*, has had its fame and ample reward in much higher spheres. *When I look back on this noble person at Edinburgh, in situations so unworthy of his brilliant powers,* and behold Lord Loughborough at London, the change seems almost like one of the metamorphoses in Ovid; and as his two preceptors, by refining his utterance, gave currency to his talents, we may say in the words of that poet, '*Nam vos mutastis.*'" All which was with a view to promotion.

Boswell's patrons were numerous, and he introduces them all into his book with various forms of compliment. Dundas had made him promises, and is accordingly elaborately complimented on his accent, but, on his putting him off year after year, he was discarded. Lord Mountstuart was another, and to him and to Lord Bute incense is constantly offered. He is careful to tell us how the former was his fellow-traveller on the Continent, and gave him a Bible.

Of "William Pepys, Esq.," one of the Masters in the Court of Chancery, "and well known in high Court circles," he was rather doubtful, and

says, guardedly: "My acquaintance with him is not sufficient to enable me to speak of him from my own judgment. But I know that both at Eton and Oxford he was an intimate friend of Sir J. Macdonald, the *Marcellus* of Scotland." Thus it will be seen that he conceives himself required to give, as it were from his seat of justice, a formal opinion or sentence, or a qualified or partial one, but *some* sort of opinion, on everyone that passes before him. It might be said generally that he never introduces the name of a noble person without adroitly slipping in, as it were, a very neat compliment.

Of Sir Philip Jennings Clark he gives this lavishly complimentary little sketch: "Sir Philip had the appearance of a gentleman of ancient family, well advanced in life. He wore his own white hair in a bag of goodly size, a black velvet coat with an embroidered waistcoat, and very rich laced ruffles, which Mrs. Thrale said were old-fashioned, but which for that reason I thought more respectable."

This calling attention to peculiarities of dress is, as his friend might have told him, not good breeding, especially when asking the public to notice the wearing of "your own hair," etc. We should note the clever side-stroke at Mrs. Thrale—dealt *en passant*, as it were.

For one so well born and of such good lineage,

it is a surprise to find Boswell so often deficient in good breeding and what is expected in correct society. All his many compliments to high personages, his freedoms with their names and doings, show the familiarity of the low-born, and must have been distasteful to those concerned.

Once Boszy was summoned from town, and he tells us all about a relation of his who had been shot in a duel—a rather notorious one. He had been at Mr. Burke's; he was summoned by express—though one would hardly think Boswell's presence necessary. However, here were the elements of notoriety—the visit to Burke, the express, the dramatic duel. But the incident is hardly connected with Dr. Johnson's life. Again, “we dined with Dr. Butter, whose lady is daughter of my cousin, Sir John Douglas, whose grandson is now presumptive heir of the noble family of Queensberry.” A Highland minister having entertained him, Boswell makes this flourish: “My cousin Miss Dallas, formerly of Inverness, was married to Mr. Riddick, one of the ministers of the English chapel.” He pronounces them to be “very worthy people.”

He must have had many difficulties during the Tour in “filling dates” and securing invitations. It is clear that in many cases these had to be negotiated, or even asked for. In that of the visit to Mr. Macleod at Rasay, this was done through a

friend, the family being quite unknown to Boswell. "We are advised," he says airily, "by some persons here to visit Rasay on our way to Dunvegan." By a gentleman he sent on a letter to the laird, informing him that "we intend in a few days to have the honour of waiting on him." At Slains Castle he was a little uncertain as to their welcome, and "hung on," as it were, hoping that the owner, Lord Errol, would appear. He did, and insisted they should stop for the night. In one of the most "precious passages," from its thorough genuineness, he portrays this Thane :

"I was exceedingly pleased with Lord Errol. His dignified person and agreeable countenance, with most unaffected affability, gave me high satisfaction. From perhaps a weakness, or, as I rather hope, more fancy and warmth of feeling than is quite reasonable, my mind is ever impressed with admiration for persons of high birth, and I could with most perfect honesty expatiate on Lord Errol's good qualities; but he stands in no need of my praise. His agreeable manners and softness of address prevented the constraint which the idea of his being Lord High Constable of Scotland might otherwise have occasioned."

Yet the Earl, after this all but grovelling worship, must have been shocked to find himself spoken of in this fashion: "I was afraid he might have

urged drinking, as I believe he used formerly to do; but he drank port and water out of a large glass, and let us do as we pleased."

Again, meeting at a dinner-party "the Honourable Mrs. Boscawen, widow of the Admiral and mother of the present Viscount Falmouth," he pays a florid and superfluous panegyric to the lady, "of whom, if it be not presumptuous in me to praise her, I would say that her manners are the most agreeable, and her conversation the best, of any lady with whom I ever had the happiness to be acquainted." Mrs. Boscawen, who survived Boswell, could not have been pleased to read this absurd encomium. And again: "I dined with him [Johnson] at the Ramsays' with Lord Newhaven and some other company, none of whom I recollect, but a beautiful Miss Graham, a relation of his lordship's, who asked Johnson to hob-and-nob with her." Indeed, the lofty fashion in which he holds his court, and judges all about him, is truly entertaining, and shows that he considers his authority just as decisive as that of his great friend. He was his deputy. Thus, of Dr. Percy's claims to be connected with the great house of Northumberland, he assures us that he had "carefully examined them, and, both as a lawyer accustomed to the consideration of evidence, and as a genealogist versed in the study of pedigree, I am fully satisfied." But he "cannot help

observing, as a matter of no small moment, the essential aid given by the Duchess of Northumberland, heiress of that illustrious house; a lady not only of high dignity of spirit, such as became her noble blood, but of excellent understanding and lively talents. With a fair pride I can boast of the honour of Her Grace's correspondence, specimens of which are in my archives." Boswell doubtless hoped that this tribute would please the noble family. But it is entirely personal, and is not concerned with Dr. Johnson.

Occasionally his attempts upon the houses of the great were unsuccessful, or he hesitated to press them home. For example, he informs us that they "passed" Gordon Castle, which "had a noble appearance." It occurred to him that this "passing" might be misconstrued; so in a note he explains: "I am not sure whether the Duke was at home, but not having the honour of being known to His Grace, I could not have presumed to enter his castle, though to introduce even so celebrated a stranger. We were, at any rate, in a hurry to get forward." "At any rate," Bozzy seems to think, in spite of the non-acquaintance, he had somewhat failed in his duty—that he *ought* to have tried to get in. But how did he come to be so uncertain as to whether the Duke was at home or not? We might be tempted to fancy

that he had made inquiries at the gate, and had been unceremoniously dismissed. Boswell is, however, evidently piqued, for he rather maliciously adds: "If the family had kept up the old Italian state, I might have procured proper letters of introduction, and devoted some time to the contemplation of venerable superstitious state."

In advertising his own merits, Boswell sometimes shows considerable adroitness. When the travellers were at Rosny one wet morning, he relates, "Sir George Mackenzie's works—the folio edition—happened to lie in a window in the dining-room. I asked Dr. Johnson to look at a particular passage." He then proceeds:

"In the sixty-fifth page of the first volume of Sir George Mackenzie, Dr. Johnson pointed out a paragraph beginning with 'Aristotle,' and told me there was an error in the text, which he bade me try to discover. I was lucky to hit on it at once. As the passage is printed, it is said that the devil answers 'even in engines.' I corrected it to 'even in enigmas.' 'Sir,' said he, 'you are a good critic. This would have been a great thing to do in the text of an ancient author.'"

The incident amply supports what has been all along contended for—that Bozzy, while setting forward his chief, was taking all due care for himself and his reputation. For the passage, it

will be seen, does not show off Johnson, but ostentatiously exhibits Boswell. Another of his ingenious devices for bold self-advertisement was the careful preservation of all Johnson's letters to him, containing, as they do, constant praises of his (Bozzy's) talent, or panegyrics by other people, set forth at length by the good-natured Johnson. This was no bad form of testimonial; and there is plenty of it.

There are several portraits of Boswell—mostly characteristic—so that his appearance is quite familiar to us. The engraving from Sir Joshua's painting must have been popular, as there were some eight or nine issues of the plate. They are worth studying, and reveal the man to us in a wonderful way. In all he is shown of a sensual type—the heavy jowl, large double chin, flabby lips, and “loose” eyes. He has also a full rotundity in front. We are afraid “woman and wine”—“Weib und Wein”—were his failings. Sir Joshua's picture, which shows us a solemn and portly personage, is the most respectable and dignified. Langton's full length is admirable for an amateur; it gives all the minutiae of his dress. Nearly all the pictures show the curious pigtail, with a string of hair and ribbons attached, which came down to the middle of his back. Lawrence's was a broad caricature, but very diverting, and recognizable as a likeness. The most genteel is a side-view and half-length—like one of

Downman's small portraits—very sad-looking and solemn.*

Nothing is better than Boswell's lavish compliments to the Townley family, "whose noble collection was not to be more admired than his *extraordinary and polite readiness in showing it*, which several of my friends have agreeably experienced." He then warns other collectors, those who are *possessed of* such valuable stores, that they should be more accommodating to the public. But what can have caused the amusing compliment to another gentleman, which reads like an official record of Mr. Boswell's approval and recognition?—" *Grateful acknowledgments are due to Wellbore Ellis, Esquire*, for the liberal access he is pleased to allow to his exquisite collection." There—*Roma locuta est*.

Boswell had quoted a letter of Smollett in which he speaks of Johnson as "the great *Chum* of literature," and Boswell rather rudely rebuked him for his ignorance; "had he been at an English University he would have known that *Chum* is a student who lived with another in a chamber common to another." Boswell could not correct this offence without offending someone and sneering at the Universities of his own land. Lord Palmerston

* I once by a narrow chance failed to secure an original water-colour sketch of Boswell which was on sale in the Brompton Road.

pointed out to him that it was evidently a misprint, and not the fault of Smollett at all. Wilkes, who printed the letter, was really accountable. He was not a man to "bother" by correcting the Press. It is strange that Boswell, who had also written "Chum," did not know what word was intended. The comic thing was his accusing Smollett of a schoolboy ignorance, whereas his own was just as crass. He, however, makes no such confession to the reader, but the nobleman's correction changed everything. He "carries it off" as if it were a debatable matter cleared up by his lordship, and as though it were a mere typographical misprint. But he could not let Lord Palmerston go without a suitable compliment: "For this correction I am indebted to Lord Palmerston, whose talents and literary acquirements accord well with his respectable pedigree of Temple." Quoting an old ballad about the Duke of Leeds—

"When the Duke of Leeds shall married be
To a fine young lady of quality"

—Bozzy introduces an unmeaning compliment: "It is with pleasure I add that this stanza could never be more truly applied than at the present time." There is something patronizing as well as admiring here, but the Duke, whom he probably did not know, is not likely to have been pleased.

Even Mrs. Boswell was occasionally allotted a

share of the family panegyric; as when Johnson, moralizing over the magnificence of some stately mansion, said: "Sir, all this excludes but one evil—poverty." Excellently said; but Boswell could not resist a little self-exaltation at the Doctor's expense; his remark could be objected to: "When I mentioned it to a lady of admirable good sense and quickness of understanding, she observed, 'It is true, but how much good does it let in?' To this observation much praise has been given." It was a good retort. And who was the lady? Why, no other than Bozzy's wife! "Let me now do myself the honour to state that the lady who made it was the late Margaret Montgomerie, *my very valuable wife* and the *very affectionate mother* of my children, who, if they inherit her good qualities, will have no reason to complain." Thus, and with ingenuous variety, does he ever contrive to play upon this personal instrument.

Boswell used singular freedom in offering himself to dine or stay with people. He had a slight acquaintance with the Speaker's chaplain, and once when on his travels sent him a card to say that he would breakfast with him on the morrow, if not inconvenient. The chaplain put him off, but said he would see him at dinner next day. This was at Grantham in 1775. "I have thought of making a good acquaintance in each town on the road"—*i.e.*,



TEA.

"My wife had tea ready for him, which it is well known he delighted to drink at all hours, particularly when sitting up late."—*Boswell's Journal*.

by calling on everyone and offering himself as a visitor. "No man has been more successful in making acquaintance easily than I have been; I even bring people quickly to a degree of cordiality. I am a quick fire, but I know not if I last sufficiently."

For Mr. Cambridge, Boswell had a sort of "aweful" veneration; so much so, that he describes Johnson as "asking Richard Owen Cambridge, *Esquire*," etc., a term he never used to anyone else. Then he breaks into almost rapturous commendation: "The owner of a beautiful villa on the banks of the Thames, a few miles distant from London; a numerous and excellent library, which he accurately knows and reads; a choice collection of pictures, which he understands and relishes; an extensive circle of friends and acquaintances, distinguished by rank, fashion, and genius; a literary fame; various elegant and increasing colloquial talents rarely to be found; and with all these means of happiness enjoying, when well advanced in years, health and vigour of body—do not these entitle him to be addressed as fortunate?"

One of the dramatic sketches in the *Tour*, which we owe to Bozzy's candour, was the scene in which a new journey to Sweden or some of the Northern realms was discussed. They would see the famous King of Sweden, who, Johnson said, would not

speaking to them; when Colonel McLeod, who had already taken Bozzy's measure after a couple of days' acquaintance, said promptly: "But Mr. Boswell would speak to him." The latter was so taken aback at this stroke that he showed it in his face; the Colonel, however, added, "and with great propriety."

Though he treated the matter lightly, it seems to have made him reflect a little ruefully on his failing, and, in a way somewhat undignified, he strives to justify himself to his readers: "Here let me offer a short defence of *the propensity in my character* to which this gentleman alluded. It has procured me much happiness; I hope it does not deserve so hard a name as either 'forwardness' or 'impudence.' If I know myself, it is nothing more than an eagerness to share the society of men distinguished either by *their rank* or their talents." And then he likens himself to the traveller who goes over mountains and seas in pursuit of knowledge, and assures us that the difficulties of "getting at" these noble and distinguished persons are quite as great and creditable—a rather far-fetched comparison.

Now, here was Boswell's "rule of life"—to know everyone worth knowing, and so advance himself in the world. His little profession of faith is quite engaging from its naïve simplicity.

In nothing is Bozzy more full than in his account

of his practice at the Bar—his hopes, prospects, purpose of shifting to the English Bar. He enjoyed but a modest practice in Edinburgh, but he is careful to tell us of every case in which he figured. This he artfully does by getting his friend to dictate a legal opinion—which is given at length, to the boring of the reader, and can have been of no value in the Scottish Courts. It was really a matter of little importance whether Boswell remained at his native Bar or joined the English; but he must describe to his readers how he consulted Johnson, and how the question was debated between them at great length. It was, of course, a foolish change, being made too late in life. It is likely, however, that he was led to take the step by promise of promotion, and one of his patrons, Lowther, secured for him the Recordship of Carlisle, which, however, he had soon to resign on the demand of this patron—a painful humiliation. Repeatedly and ostentatiously he boasts of his connection with the Douglas cause, and of how on one occasion he had to appear before the House of Lords. As, however, the list of counsel contained over a dozen of the most distinguished names, with Boswell last, we may take it that his aid was not required, and that he merely attended to please himself, and as a sort of spectator. There can be little doubt that he was merely named *ex gratiâ* and at his

own request, and in return for having written on the subject. He used to appear also in the General Assembly at Edinburgh, and some of his discourses are preserved. A few of his arguments he published separately, such as that on the piracies of Edinburgh booksellers. But whatever he did connected with the legal profession, all is told at length. Even the thesis which he wrote on his admission to the Scottish Bar is laid before us; and the Latin of the dedication is minutely discussed with Johnson.* Who can forget, too, the all-important question of the resettlement of the Auchinleck estate, on which he plagued, not only Johnson, but all his friends?

“I told him that I was engaged as counsel at the Bar of the House of Lords to oppose a Road Bill in the county of Stirling.” He wanted advice as to the manner of addressing their lordships. But how adroit this method of self-advertisement under the guise of seeking help! Everyone should know that he was pleading before the august House of Lords. It was really not a matter of much moment to the reader of a Life of Johnson whether Mr. Boswell was successful after leaving the Scotch Bar. He, however, thought it necessary to explain the causes

* I possess Boswell's own copy, bound in vellum, and with his autograph. It must be said that in his argument with the Doctor on the correct Latinity of the dedication he is quite convincing, and proves Johnson to be in error.

of his failure. "I am convinced the same certainty of success cannot be promised to the same degree of merit. The reasons of the rapid rise of some and the disappointment of others equally respectable are such as it might seem invidious to mention."

After oddly trying, as it seemed, to disturb his friend's content with his career, by suggesting that he ought to have had high offices, but that inferior men had been preferred, he diverges into a sort of meditation on his own case, where, with all his efforts, he had altogether failed—at the Bar, in politics, in letters, etc.: "I cannot help thinking that men of merit who have had no success in life may be forgiven for *lamenting*, if they are not allowed to *complain*. They may consider it hard that their merit should not have its suitable distinction."

Among other pursuits, Boswell was the most persistent and systematic place-hunter that ever existed. It was a fixed part of his character. When he was introduced to anyone of rank or importance—peer, Minister, or country gentleman—he immediately felt that here was one who might benefit him, and accordingly he assiduously followed him. He had a vast number of these "patrons," as he chose to dub them, and he gave them no peace from his importunity. The result was that he must have become known as the most terrible

of bores, and that after a certain number of formal "put-offs" he was at last rudely "snubbed," and so got rid of. His amazing and repeated applications were generally accompanied with such exaggerated encomiums of his own merits as to make the whole something grotesque, and the cause of laughter at his expense.

From the first he had fastened on Mr. Pitt, addressing him after his Corsican tour and paying him compliments, etc.; and this imposed on the Minister, who answered with a certain politeness. As time went on he began to grow more pressing—and to offer advice, which was received with all the natural coldness of the great man. The extent to which he nourished this delusion is really incredible. "He has given Pitt a prejudice against me. The excellent Langton says it is disgraceful; it is utter folly in Pitt not to reward and attach to his administration a man *of my popular and pleasant talents*. He did not answer several letters which I wrote requesting to wait on him. Lately I wrote to him that such behaviour was not generous. 'I think it is not just, and (forgive the freedom) I doubt if it be wise. If I do not hear from you in ten days, I shall conclude that you are resolved to have no more communication with me.'" Here was a terrible ultimatum for Pitt to face. Poor Boszy fancied that he had thus driven him into a

corner. The loss of such a correspondent—a man, too, “of my popular and pleasant talents”—would give him pause. Strange to say, the miserable Minister took no notice! A month—two months—went by: no answer ever came!

The incredible blindness and absurdity of all this is scarcely to be believed. The notion that a Prime Minister should receive or attend to such applications could only have occurred to a foolish man. Brother David was also pushing himself forward. “Pitt has behaved very ill in his neglect of me. I now think Dundas a sad fellow in his private capacity.” He had pledged himself solemnly to Brother David, but had since “used him cruelly.” Other passages in the Life, which may at first sight seem unmeaning, once more prove the autobiographical character of Boswell’s record.

But in a short time all his hopes faded to nothing. He “wished to be laid by his dear wife. Every prospect that I turn my mind’s eye to is dreary: why should I struggle?” He was forced to make a strange acknowledgment: “I certainly am constitutionally unfit for any employment.” His sons had to be sent to Eton, and through them he hoped to make influential friends. I think the true state of the case was that poor Bozzy was so much the creature of his imagination and fond hopes, that these visions of promotion

were seen through the muddied fumes of wine. We may assume it to be certain that no promises had been made by these high personages, who, according to custom, did not go beyond the polite formula "that Mr. Boswell, should an opportunity offer," etc. He had a dreamy notion of a Lord of Sessions' place, but that would doom him to Edinburgh: of such an office he had not the remotest chance.

But he soon rallied, and wrote to Johnson, taking care to publish the letter: "Mrs. Cobb gave me the high satisfaction of hearing that you said 'Mr. Boswell is a man who, I believe, never left a house without leaving a wish for his return.'"

"I told a very pleasing young lady—niece to one of the Prebendaries [in a note he supplies her name—Miss Letitia Barnston]: 'I have come to Chester, madam, I cannot tell how; and far less can I tell how *I am to get away from it.*'"

All these flourishings were to dazzle the crowd and make them say: "Wonderful man, Mr. Boswell! how he attracts the ladies, how everyone praises and follows him!"

It is easy to see, from many indications in his books, that Bozzy owed many of his distinguished acquaintances to his own pushful methods. He was eager to "get to know" those who were of rank, or distinguished in other ways—in all societies there are numbers of this class.

Another of his odd notions was that, when a person was intimate at a house, he should have the privilege of bringing a friend to dinner or breakfast without invitation—indeed, it would appear, without acquaintance even. If he acted on this system, he must have met with many a snub.

CHAPTER V

FOURTH MOTOR FORCE—WEIN UND WEIB

THE powerful "motor forces" which impelled Boswell to fill his great work with details of himself and his life must include wine and women (Wein und Weib), and vanity. His vanity and love of the fair sex went together—wine also with them. Admiration of the ladies was, perhaps, the most dominant of the forces. That a biographer of an eminent man should stop or turn aside to record his own penchant for the other sex—his admirations and his flirtations, to say nothing of the tipsy exhibitions which at times accompanied them—can only be accounted for on the ground that he intended to exhibit himself and his doings.

Boswell was always more or less of a "figure of fun," but when he assumed a double chin and a portly, conspicuous frontal, it was impossible to look on him sentimentally. When his friend Colonel Stuart was one day rallying him on this sore point, and asking him roughly how he came to be so ugly, the incomparable Bozzy, thinking himself irresistible, and feeling how little

his friend knew, could not resist saying: "*Does your wife think so?*" This incredible retort, the last another man would have thought of, considering to whom he was speaking, is perhaps the most exquisite of our hero's—it was so hopelessly fatuous. It must have entertained the husband immensely, and we may be certain that he and the lady had many a laugh over it. But they would not take him seriously; and they were not to be blamed, for he himself in his odd antics made it impossible for them to do so. The singular combination of plain looks and figure, with a consciousness of being most attractive in his amorous advances, left only a ludicrous impression on the fair ones.

To his friend Temple he writes of his doubtful doings at inns: "There is a handsome maid at this inn [at Grantham] who interrupts me by sometimes coming into the room." We doubt if it was the handsome maid that interrupted. He makes it take the form of a complaint; but he is an incorrigible flirt, wishing to convey that he had made an impression. The history of the handsome maid was duly followed up. He had later to confess to his friend that at Grantham "there had been a pretty brisk gale, which shook his moral supports!"

The most extraordinary thing of all was his belief that such details lent him importance, and that it was a matter in which he figured with

credit! When he could set down such things, is it not clear that he was not thinking of the Doctor or of his Life, but was striving merely to set himself off and show what a personage he was? All this, faithful biographer as he attempted to be, he took care to make prominent in his friend's life. Behind all his most casual allusions to *le beau sexe* we can see an attempt to make out that he was a Lovelace of a dangerous sort. He confides to his readers the details of his social life, the friends and enemies he made, the pleasures that he enjoyed—he spares us no single particular. It is almost the “biographer day by day”—dinners, social meetings, travels, junketings, discussions, quarrels, and loves. Rarely or never has a biographer stopped the performance to introduce an account of his particular flames, for whom he contrives to find niches in some fashion.

Of the two popular forces, woman and wine, it would be difficult to say which was Bozzy's worse enemy. The vain fellow, in spite of his puffed cheeks, double chin or chins, and somewhat ridiculous appearance, always fancied that he was irresistible with the other sex. His flirtations with married ladies were carried on ostentatiously, though these dames were no doubt making a jest of their portly admirer. So proud is he of his prowess that he all but takes the reader into his confidence. He had clearly little respect for the

adage not to "kiss and tell." These adventures had nothing whatever to do with Johnson or his Life, but they present another facet of the versatile Bozzy's character. A biographer may be indulged if he gives a few details about himself, but to talk about his amours and amourettes, his flirtations, to compliment certain ladies on their charms, their delightful manners, to praise even the maid-servants, seems going a little too far save in a chronicle of the writer's own life.

So eager was Boswell that the reader should suppose he was a gay fellow that at times he goes beyond the limits of literary propriety and decorum. It almost makes one wince to find Johnson saying to him at Ranelagh: "You know you would have been with a wench had you not been here. Oh, I forgot you were married!" There is an irreverent flippancy here which makes it all but incredible that Johnson would have uttered such a speech. The indulgent way in which "being with a wench" is treated, the implied reserve that it might be pardoned in single folk, though not in a married person, must shock admirers of the Sage. But did he say the words?—or was it only one of his boisterous jests, though his friend conveys that it was made in all seriousness? By leaving the matter in doubt Bozzy may have thought to score a strong point in his own favour. And see the result of this idle record! Taken down in writing, printed in multi-

plied editions, read by tens of thousands of people, the impression left is that the great moralist thought such lapses to be a trifling matter—at all events in the unmarried man. Readers will recall Boswell's allusions to Mrs. Rudd, the adventuress who had helped to hang the Perreaus. He describes his visits to this person, as if dictated by mere curiosity to see one whom all the town was talking about. Even Johnson innocently declared that "he envied his friend for his acquaintance with her." It seems certain, however, that Bozzy's intimacy was more close than he chose to record; it became notorious; and he was actually induced to write an account of the lady—some sort of vindication, one presumes. There is a song of his printed in her praise, which implies that he had gone off with her to Ireland. Nor is it difficult to gather something of the truth from the strain of his allusions. He calls her "the celebrated Margaret Caroline Rudd, whom I had visited, induced by the fame of her talents, address, and irresistible powers of fascination"—a very deceptive description of the woman, who was a coarse, abandoned creature.

One of his flames, or one whom he wished to advertise as such, was Lady Diana Beauclerk. But the way in which he treated this accomplished lady of high degree—a Spencer by birth—formerly wife of Mr. St. John, and now (after divorce) of Johnson's friend, was scandalous; and yet, as we must

believe, he was so eager to publish the partiality he enjoyed that he could not resist announcing it to the public. All through his book he carefully records instances of his dallings with the other sex; he notes each pretty face that he meets, and the favour with which he is received. It is worth while to follow his methods. When he was anxiously awaiting the news of his fate at the Club, he tells the reader that it was "Lady Di" who kept him in talk to divert his thoughts by "her charming conversation." Yet almost at the same moment we find him endeavouring to apologize to the Doctor for a divorced lady, excusing her because the husband had treated her brutally, urging that her delicacy had been wounded, and that while in this state another had gained her heart. "Seduced perhaps by the charms of the lady in question, I thus attempted to palliate what could not be justified." "My dear friend," said the great man, "never accustom your mind to mingle virtue and vice. The woman's a ——, and there's an end on't." The unseemly word *Bozzy*, incredible as it may seem, sets down in its naked effrontery. The lady was Lady Diana herself! She was alive at the time to read the account. The whole Johnsonian "set" must have recognized her on the instant. Beauclerk had been dead some time, so she had no protector. What rage, what grief, must she have felt at finding the coarse words of the market asso-

ciated with her name! Yet, indecent and despicable as the act was, we believe Boswell was perfectly unconscious that he was doing anything improper or ungentlemanly. And what was his object?—To prove that he was favoured and preferred by “a fine woman.” Arguing with Johnson as to the propriety of a neglected wife retaliating, Boswell declared that he knew a lady who upheld this system. Johnson roughly said it was “sad stuff,” and added: “This lady of yours is only fit for a brothel,” printing the unbecoming word at length. This lady also may have been alive at the time. These things seem incredible, unbecoming, ungentlemanly, unworthy of a decent person. True, the name is not supplied, but any of the circle could have supplied it.

CHAPTER VI

FIFTH MOTOR FORCE—HUMOUR

THE conventional biographer does not think of retailing facetious anecdotes in which he himself figures; nor is he inclined even to figure with his subject in comic situations. He is not entitled to exhibit him grotesquely, or in an absurd position, so as to excite a laugh. Forster, in the "Life of Dickens," never attempts such liberties. Boswell, however, has no scruples, and tells us many a diverting tale—and tells them admirably—in which he is the chief performer and commentator. He recites also humours that have no connection with the matter in hand, exactly as one writing his own memoirs would do, such as that of the German jumping over the chairs "to learn to be lively"—a reminiscence of his own. All which is the *assertion* of his own power and of his own position and leadership.

Almost everything in Bozzy's character is a puzzle and a mystery. How could so solemn and literal a person—for such he was—be led on by his vanity to utter propositions and make statements

with all gravity that could only be received with loud laughter, such as, for instance, his patent plan for being roused in the morning by weights and similar contrivances? How could such a being be endowed with the keenest sense of humour and a perfect relish for the absurdities of others? He could set out such follies in others with a sly irony and reserve that is simply perfect and delightful. His sense of humour was of the first class, strong, delicate, and refined, dashed with a pleasant irony which shows that he could see deeply enough. Vividly he could call up the situation, vividly place it before us, and show in a quiet fashion that he saw the latent absurdity. 'There are two little stories which he tells in almost perfect style, with a due reserve, leaving the reader to find out the point for himself, and only expressing a smiling enjoyment. No one was more acute in noting an exhibition of folly in another, no one more blind in his own case.

'Take, for instance, his illustration of the obsequious pomposity of Johnson to noblemen, which seems always to have been intensely relished by Boszy. Thus, when a certain lord—Lord Newhaven—was at a dinner at which Johnson was present, in discussing politics the nobleman took the opposite side, but very respectfully said: "I speak with great deference to you, Dr. Johnson." "*This had its full effect on my friend. He bowed*

his head almost as low as the table to a complimentary nobleman, and called out: 'My lord, my lord, I do not desire all this ceremony: let us tell our minds to one another.' After the debate was over, he said: '*I have got lights on the subject which I had not before.*'" The sly, respectful fashion in which Bozzy reports all this is admirable.

Again, we claim admiration for the method in which the following scene is described:

"A foreign Minister of no very high talents, who had been in his company for a considerable time quite overlooked, happened luckily to mention that he had read some of his *Rambler* in Italian, and admired it much. This pleased him greatly, and finding that this Minister gave such a proof of his taste, he was all attention to him, and on the first remark which he made, however simple, exclaimed: 'The Ambassador says well,' 'His Excellency observes'; and then he expanded and enriched the little that had been said in so strong a manner that it appeared something of consequence. This was exceedingly entertaining to the company who were present, and many a time afterwards it furnished a pleasant topic of merriment. 'The Ambassador says well' became a laughable term of applause when no mighty matter had been expressed." We could well imagine this tale related, say, of the late John Forster, Dickens's friend, whom I often witnessed behaving exactly as Johnson did on this occa-

sion. I could fancy him at a dinner-party where there was a stranger whom he had scarcely noticed. Let us suppose this gentleman happening to mention that he had read a translation of Forster's "Life of Goldsmith." Forster, pleased during the rest of the dinner, might now listen to him with the greatest attention, and when he said something of a rather trifling sort, would be heard to say, "Mr. — says well," and would then amplify his remark into something important. Later it might become a sort of joke among Forster's friends as a bit of ironical praise. Boszzy evidently heartily enjoyed the revelation of his great friend's weakness, though he *says* nothing to that effect.

Another story is equally happy, but more farcical. Boswell places the solution before us with all the skill of a first-class comedy-writer; he almost sets us down among the company. The Doctor was telling in a mixed company of someone who had married a printer's "devil," which caused some amusement. "Then, looking very serious and very earnest, he added: 'And she did not disgrace him. *The woman had a bottom of good sense.*' The word *bottom* thus introduced was so ludicrous when contrasted with his gravity that we could not help laughing, though I recollect that the Bishop of Killaloe kept his countenance with perfect steadiness, while Miss Hannah More shyly hid her face behind a lady's back who sat on the same

settee with her. His pride could not bear that any expression of his should excite ridicule when he did not intend it; he therefore resolved to assume and exercise despotic power, and glanced sternly around, and called out in a strong tone: 'Where's the merriment?' Then, collecting himself and looking awful, to make us feel how he could impose restraint, and as it were searching his mind for a still more ludicrous word, he slowly pronounced: 'I say the woman is fundamentally sensible.'"

Boswell practised the art of reproducing the style of other people, and once did so in the case of a story told him by Beauclerk, "which I shall endeavour to exhibit as well as I can *in that gentleman's lively manner.*" But the story is so happily told — as a pictorial effort — that I am convinced the delicate strokes are Bozzy's own.

Here is a pleasant, clever sketch full of true humour: "Some time after this, upon his making a remark, Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Hall were both together striving to answer. He grew angry, and called out loudly: 'Nay, when you both speak at once it is intolerable.' But checking himself, and softening, he said: 'This one may say, though you *are* ladies.' Then he brightened into gay good-humour, and addressed them in the words of one of the songs in the 'Beggar's Opera':

"But two at a time no mortal can bear."

‘What, sir!’ said I, ‘are you going to turn Captain Macheath?’” There is something pleasantly ludicrous in this.

When Madame de Boufflers was in England, Beauclerk took her to see Johnson in Temple Lane, where she was entertained with his conversation for some time. “When our visit was over,” Boswell describes Beauclerk as saying, “she and I left him, and when we got into Temple Lane, all at once *I heard a noise like thunder*. This was occasioned by Johnson, who it seems, upon a little recollection, had taken it into his head that he ought to have done the honours of his literary residence to a foreign lady of quality, and, *eager to show himself a man of gallantry, was hurrying down in violent agitation*. He overtook us before we reached the Temple Gate, and, brushing in between us, *seized her hand and conducted her to her coach*. His dress was a rusty brown morning suit, a pair of old shoes by way of slippers, a little shrivelled wig sticking on the top of his head, and the sleeves of his shirt and the knees of his breeches hanging loose.” Here we are looking on a perfect picture, and see and hear the whole: Boswell visualized it at once. It was a touch of character, so it appealed to him.

This sly comment on his friend’s oddities is admirable: “Generally, when he [Johnson] had concluded a period in the course of a dispute, by

which he was a good deal exhausted by violence and vociferation, he used to blow out his breath like a whale. This, I suppose, was a relief to his lungs, and seemed to him to be a contemptuous mode of expression, as if he had made the arguments of his opponent fly before the wind." Here is a pleasant irony, while he affects admiration.

Often his sketches are perfect pictures, so vividly drawn are they. Witness the following: "It was not safe to make sport of one so robust as he was. Mr. Langton saw him one day, in a fit of absence, by a sudden start, drive the load off a porter's back, and walk forward briskly without being conscious of what he had done. The porter was very angry, but stood still, and eyed the huge figure with much earnestness, till he was satisfied that his wisest course was to be quiet and take up his burden again." Admirable subject for a painter, and admirably painted. "Johnson and his friend Beauclerk were once together in company with several clergymen, who thought they would appear to advantage by assuming the lax jollity of *men of the world*; which, as it may be observed in similar cases, they carried to noisy excess. Johnson, who they expected would be entertained, sat grave and silent for some time; at last, turning to Beauclerk, he said, *by no means in a whisper*: 'This merriment of parsons is mighty offensive'—admirably chosen words!

No one had a better eye for dramatic effect or for grouping his figures and incidents so as to "tell." I could not furnish a better specimen than one pleasant little story he relates. Foote he evidently disliked, and the dislike was reciprocated. Once talking over the actor with Johnson, Boswell asked him :

“ ‘Pray, sir, is not Foote an infidel?’ Johnson : ‘ I do not know, sir, that the fellow is an infidel ; but if he be an infidel, he is an infidel as a dog is an infidel—that is to say, he has never thought upon the subject.’ Boswell : ‘ I suppose, sir, he has thought superficially, and seized the first notions which occurred to his mind.’ Johnson : ‘ Why then, sir, still he is like a dog that snatches the piece next him.’ ” A happy, amusing criticism with a ready illustration.

Boswell goes on to tell the sequel : “ When Mr. Foote was at Edinburgh, he thought fit to entertain a numerous Scotch company with a great deal of coarse jocularities at the expense of Dr. Johnson, imagining it would be acceptable. I felt this as not civil to me, but sat very patiently till he had exhausted his merriment on that subject ; and then observed, that surely Johnson must be allowed to have some sterling wit, and that I had heard him say a very good thing of Mr. Foote himself. ‘ Ah, my old friend Sam ’ (cried Foote), ‘ no man says better things : do let us have it.’ ”

Upon which I told the above story, which produced a very loud laugh from the company. But I never saw Foote so disconcerted. He looked grave and angry, and entered into a serious refutation of the justice of the remark. ‘What, sir’ (said he), ‘talk thus of a man of liberal education! a man who for years was at the University of Oxford: a man who has added sixteen new characters to the English drama of his country!’” And of the three figures in this dramatic scene, which is the most important—Johnson, Foote, or Boswell?

Boswell’s delicate sense of mental analysis is shown in the pleasant talk about “Gargantua,” a nickname given to the Doctor in some publication. On Miss Reynolds asking the meaning of the application, Johnson “was obliged to explain it to her, *which had something of an awkward and ludicrous effect.* ‘Why, madam, it has a reference to me as using big words which require the mouth of a giant to pronounce them.’” Boswell, always ready, quoted another line that also applied to him. But Johnson said: “No, sir—Gargantua.” But presently, when Johnson asked, “Who said that?” Boswell, with his usual lack of tact, answered, “Gargantua,” which was somewhat of a liberty, as was, indeed, at once conveyed to him; for he noticed that the Sage “looked serious,” which was an indication that “he did not wish it to be kept up.” What touches of character are here!—Johnson of a sudden resent-

ing what he had a moment before approved; and, best of all, Bozzy's utter unconsciousness that he was guilty of an impropriety. I venture to say that any skilled writer who tried to tell this story would find it difficult to better convey the delicate points touched here.

It is impossible not to laugh at another farcical sketch where Dr. Taylor cuts a droll figure: *
 "Dr. Taylor's nose happening to bleed, he said it was because he had omitted to have himself blooded four days after a quarter of a year's interval. Dr. Johnson, who was a great dabbler in physic, disapproved much of periodical bleeding. . . . 'I do not like to take an emetic,' said Doctor Taylor, 'for fear of breaking some small vessels.'

* One is always inclined to turn away from the habitual *joking* man. He lives in an atmosphere of unreality, if not of untruth, for his comic view of things is mostly an untrue one. À Kempis on several occasions deals severely with such professors of mirth. "If you would make any progress, be not too free; curb all your senses under discipline, and give not yourself up to foolish mirth. . . . It is wonderful that any man can ever abandon himself *wholly* to joy in this life when he considers and weighs his exile. Through levity of heart and shortening of our defects, we feel not the sorrows of the soul. We often vainly laugh when we ought to weep."

The spirit of *comedy* is an altogether different thing. True comedy is one of the genuine, necessary delights of life. It is the great cure for follies. It blows them away into the air or dissolves them. It pierces to the truth, and shows things in their nakedness. But true comedy, alas! is now extinct.

‘Poh!’ said Johnson, ‘if you have so many things that will break, you had better break your neck at once, and there’s an end on’t. You will break no small vessels’ (*blowing with much derision*).”

Boswell’s sketch of Catcot, the Bristol pewterer and ardent believer in the Chatterton forgeries, is another of his happy pictures. “Dr. Johnson, at his desire, read aloud several of Chatterton’s fabricated verses, while Catcot stood at the back of his chair, moving himself like a pendulum, and beating time with his feet, and now and then looking into Johnson’s face, and wondering he was not yet convinced. Honest Catcot seemed to pay no attention whatever to any objections, but insisted, as an end of all controversy, that we should go with him to the tower of St. Mary Redcliffe, and view with our own eyes the ancient chest in which the manuscripts were found.” The Doctor good-naturedly agreed, and toiled up the long stair till they came to “the wonderful chest.” “‘There,’ said Catcot, with abounding confident credulity—‘there is the very chest itself.’ After this ocular demonstration there was no more to be said.” (We think of Mr. Pickwick’s “bouncing confident credulity” in the matter of the Cobham stone; he was satisfied with being assured that it had been *in situ* beyond all recollection, which was true, though it did not apply to the inscription.) How pleasantly humorous

is the scene, and Boswell's sly enjoyment of the whole! He certainly excelled in such drawings.

Bozzy knew well how to give a point to a "good thing"—in other words, how to "carry a story." His touch is light, and he deals with the essentials only. How well, for instance, is the following presented! In one of his discussions, when Johnson was considering wine-drinking, Boswell reminded him how he used to sit up drinking with him at the Mitre, and how he used to have a headache after. Here was a lack of tact, for it implied that he was led by Johnson into these excesses. "He did not like to have this recalled, or perhaps, thinking that I had boasted improperly, resolved to have a witty stroke at me. 'Nay, sir, it was not the wine that made your head ache, but the sense I put into it.' 'What, sir, does sense make the head ache?' 'Yes, sir,' with a smile, 'when it is not used to it.'" The wit and readiness here are equal. But how happily Bozzy puts it before us! that touch "with a smile" saves all description. But it suddenly occurs to him, oddly enough, that people might think there was here something uncivil. For he says, "No man with a true sense of pleasantry could be offended at this," especially as Johnson had given him repeated proofs of his regard and estimation. Thus does he exhibit to us the little currents of his mind.

I have said that Boswell's acuteness in discrimi-

nating mental phenomena was surprising. For instance: "Mr. Beauclerk was very entertaining this day, and told us a number of short stories in a lively, elegant manner, and with that air of *the world* which has I know not what impressive effect, as *if there were something more than is expressed or than perhaps we would understand.*" This is very happy.

We cannot sufficiently admire Bozzy's appreciation of striking touches of character. They appeal to him, and no one knows better how to set them in a humorous light. Thus, of Richardson's vanity: "One day at his country-house, where an eager company was assembled at dinner, a gentleman who was just returned from Paris, willing to please Mr. Richardson, mentioned to him a very flattering circumstance—that he had seen his 'Clarissa' lying on the King's brother's table. Richardson, observing that part of the company were engaged in talking to each other, affected not to hear it. But by-and-by, when there was a general silence, and he thought that the flattery might be fully heard, he addressed himself to the gentleman: 'I think, sir, you were saying something about——?' 'It was nothing, sir, a matter not worth attention.'"

Equally piquant and humorous is his telling of another story in which "Goldy" figured, who, he said, was "still more mortified when, talking in company with *fluent vivacity*, and, as he flattered

himself, to the admiration of all who were present, a German who sat next him, and perceived *Johnson rolling himself as if about to speak*, suddenly stopped him, saying: 'Stop, stop! Dr. Shonson is about to say something.' This, no doubt, was very provoking, especially to one so irritable as Goldsmith, who frequently mentioned it with strong expressions of indignation." The irony of the last few words is admirable—Boswell affecting to sympathize with his friend.

Again, take the Bear story. "The mention of the wolf had led Johnson to think of other wild beasts, and while Sir Joshua and Mr. Langton were carrying on a dialogue about something which engaged them earnestly, he in the midst broke out: 'Pennant tells of bears' (what he added I have forgotten). They went on, which he, being dull of hearing, did not perceive, or, if he did, was not willing to break off his talk; so he continued to vociferate his remarks, and 'bear,' 'like a word in a catch,' as Beauclerk said, was repeatedly heard at intervals. This coming from him, who had been so often assimilated to that ferocious animal, while we who were sitting round could hardly stifle laughter, produced a very ludicrous effect." Admirably told and well coloured.

I always think that for dramatic effect and true character nothing could excel the effect of one little sketch. During a long theological discussion Gold-

smith had been listening while the Doctor thundered away. “During this argument Goldsmith sat in restless agitation, from a wish to get in and shine. Finding himself excluded, he had taken his hat to go away, but remained for some time with it in his hand, *like a gamester who at the close of a long night lingers for a little while to see if he can have a favourable opening to finish with success.* Once when he was beginning to speak, he found himself overpowered by the loud voice of Johnson, who was at the opposite end of the table and did not perceive Goldsmith’s attempt. Thus disappointed of his wish to obtain the attention of the company, Goldsmith in a passion threw down his hat, looking angrily at Johnson, and exclaiming in a bitter tone, ‘*Take it.*’ When Toplady was going to speak, Johnson uttered some sound, which led Goldsmith to think that he was beginning again and taking the words from Toplady. Upon which, he seized this opportunity of venting his own envy and spleen, under the pretext of supporting another person; ‘Sir,’ said he to Johnson, ‘the gentleman has heard you patiently for an hour: pray allow us now to hear him.’ Johnson (sternly): ‘Sir, I was not interrupting the gentleman. I was only giving him a signal of my attention. Sir, you are impertinent.’ Goldsmith made no reply, but continued in the company for some time.”

How vivid, how true to life, the shades of

character! The only blemish or mistake is the suggestion of "spleen and envy," which is too heavy and gross a touch for the situation—Goldy was merely "put out." But it is altogether masterly, and exquisitely visualized. The ending, too, is equally dramatic. The talk went on, the whole party adjourned to the Club, "where we found" new company, "and amongst them our friend Goldsmith, *who sat silently* brooding over Johnson's reprimand to him. . . . Johnson perceived this, and said aside to some of us, 'I'll make Goldsmith forgive me,' and then called to him in a loud voice, 'Dr. Goldsmith, something passed to-day where you and I dined; I ask your pardon.' Goldsmith answered placidly, 'It must be much from you, sir, that I take ill.' And so at once the difference was over, and they were on as easy terms as ever, and Goldsmith rattled away as usual."

Johnson said: "Sir, I don't know but if Peter had cultivated all the arts of gaiety as David has done, he might have been as brisk and lively. Depend upon it, sir, vivacity is much an art, and depends greatly on habit." How pleasant are these touches and how agreeably they come in! Then Mr. Boswell takes his place and gives his judgment: "*I believe* there is a *good deal of truth* in this, notwithstanding a ludicrous story told me by a lady abroad, of a heavy German Baron who

had lived much with a young English party at Geneva, and was ambitious to be as lively as they, with which view he, *with assiduous exertion* [a Johnsonism], was jumping over the tables and chairs in his lodgings. And when the people of the house *ran in* and asked what was the matter, he answered, '*J'apprends d'être fif.*' Few stories have been more quoted than this.

But a truly Zoffany-like portrait is that of the candidate poet who had brought his verses to Johnson. It is masterly; we all but see and hear him. The poem was a translation of Horace's "*Carmen Seculare.*" The author bluntly asked his critic "if it was a good one." "Johnson, whose regard for truth was uncommonly strict, seemed to be puzzled for a moment what answer to make, but with ingenuity evaded the question thus: 'I do not say that it may not be made a good translation.' A printed ode to 'The Warlike Genius of Britain' came next in review. The bard was a lank, bony figure with short black hair; he was writhing himself in agitation while Johnson read, *and showing his teeth in a grin of earnestness*, and exclaimed in broken sentences and a sharp, keen tone: 'Is that poetry, sir? Is that Pindar?' 'Why, sir,' said Johnson, 'there is a great deal of what is called poetry.' Then, turning to me, the poet cried: 'My muse has not been long upon the town, and' (pointing to the ode) 'it trembles

under the hand of the great critic.' Johnson, who was still stern, said: 'Here is an error, sir; you have made genius feminine.' 'Palpable, sir,' cried the enthusiast, '*I know it*; but' (in a lower tone) 'it was to pay a compliment to the Duchess of Devonshire, with which her Grace was pleased. She is walking across Coxheath in the military, and I suppose her to be the genius of Britain.' 'Sir,' said Johnson, 'you are giving a reason for it, but that will not make it right. You may have a reason why two and two should make five, but they will still make four.'" The scene is vividly dramatic: the rough figure of Johnson sitting in judgment, the mad poet with his genius in regimentals, Bozzy looking on. What a touch that "showing his teeth in a grin of earnestness"!

But, again, how did Boswell contrive to store up so accurately all these details of the scene? It was really *because* he had this power of seizing on the whole humorous aspect of the picture; so vividly was this impressed on his memory that, no doubt, a few days after he was describing the whole to friends, with all the dramatic colouring complete. And the picture supplied him with the dialogue. He thus re-created it. Without this humorous appreciation he would not have succeeded.

Boswell's spirit of humour was of the true kind—reserved, refined, and mellow. It was the most fortunate thing in the world for his book

that he was thus provided ; otherwise we might have had Johnson presented to us under *literal* conditions, all his sayings being described with an accurate, heavy touch—which, after all, must destroy the effect.

It is difficult to describe what is a truly humorous style. The author must not be conscious of style at all—that is, he must be unaffected. He must pierce below the chalk, and come to the pure water.

One of the most singular discussions that have occurred of late is one which arose out of some *soi-disant* vindication of Goldsmith, who, it was presumed, was unjustly assailed, from jealousy or malice, by Boswell. This is a truly absurd mistake, because it takes Bozzy too seriously. He treated Goldsmith exactly as he treated all his contemporaries, of whatever degree, who chose to stand in his way or give him annoyance—un-ceremoniously and roughly. He spoke of him as he did of all the rest—without mincing. It is enough to mention that he describes the little quarrel with Johnson, which really gives the most favourable and engaging portrait of the poet.

It is astonishing that these critics should not have seen that this self-constituted judge of the society represented the general opinion of Goldy, as an eager, clever, hurried Irishman, blundering out his thoughts without pause or reflection, but good-

hearted and good-natured all the time. It was clear that Johnson had an affection for him and respected him—feelings that he scarcely entertained for Boswell. I doubt if he ever really *loved* his great admirer. It is not too much to say that we owe to Boswell the best and most favourable sketch of Goldsmith. Most amusing and dramatic are the tales he tells. Boswell, in fact, saw that poor Goldsmith was treated good-humouredly as a sort of “butt,” and accordingly followed suit. We can see from the accounts that he had little respect for Boswell, and spoke to him without ceremony, laughing at him for thinking of “lugging” the Doctor about Scotland. This kind of Irishman, though full of joke and jest, can make himself very “nasty at times.”

The connection may be a little remote, but, it seems to me that there is a strong flavour of Boswellian humour to be found in Dickens's masterpiece, “Pickwick.” Dickens, who was a general reader, and even a little recondite in his studies, was very familiar with that era; and as there are some things in his work actually introduced from Boswell's, it is hardly going too far to say that the general idea was suggested from the same quarter. A travelling party, a club with a president and “followers,” a curious likeness in the characters of the leaders, each being despotic, if not tyrannical—the very Christian names being the same—these were

points of resemblance ; but a greater resemblance is found in the tone of the two stories. Many of the Pickwickian displays of temper might be transferred to the hero of the Life, with only a change of names.

Not many have noted the curious similarity between the two great books, Bozzy's "Johnson" and Boz's "Pickwick." The eager, enthusiastic boy Dickens was deeply impressed by the various great writers he read or devoured. Fielding, Smollett, Scott, and Boswell—we can trace them in all his writings. Boswell's work was supremely in his way and to his fancy. We have only to think of it: the notion of a dictatorial man at the head of a party, a despot over his friends, perpetually laying down the law, constantly travelling about attended by an obsequious friend. We have Johnson and his Boswell, Pickwick and his Winkle; indeed, Boz once wrote an excellent parody of Bozzy's style.

In January 1773, we find the Doctor writing: "I dined yesterday *on crumpets*." This is a strange, unusual dish for a dinner, but it is certain to suggest to us Pickwick and Sam Weller. Boz's curious adaptation of the Buttered Muffin story is worth considering in this view. Beauclerk mentioned a friend who, loving buttered muffins but being unable to digest them, determined on suicide, previous to which he ate a hearty

meal of the dainties, knowing that he would have no sufferings from the effect. We know what a humorous picture Boz evolved out of this—how Sam described a dyspeptic who every night had his quantum of crumpets until he was forbidden by the doctor to touch them, as a course of crumpets would assuredly kill him. “But how many?” asked the patient.—“So many dozen.” He ordered them, and, as Sam related it, “eat ’em all and blew his brains out.”

The delightfully enjoyable scenes at Rasay are suggested again as we read in “Pickwick” of the Christmas festivities at Manor Farm. It is certain Boz had the whole tone of the proceedings in his retentive mind, and perfectly set before us the same sense of social happiness.

Everyone will recall the painful scene when Bozzy could not help bursting into a laugh at the notion of the Doctor keeping a seraglio, and was “sat upon” and overwhelmed with ridicule and “degrading images” for his disrespect. Who will forget Mr. Pickwick’s rage with Tupman because he appeared to laugh at his chief’s appearing in silk stockings for the first time? The spirit of both scenes was the same. He treated Winkle with the same insulting tyranny when he ordered his skates to be taken off as Johnson did in the case of his henchman on a hundred occasions in presence of the public.

It is an odd coincidence, by the way, that the Doctor attended reviews at Rochester on the "lines" just as Mr. Pickwick did; nay, the Doctor may have stayed at the Bull Inn—who knows? The Doctor attended an election at Plymouth, and pretended to assume a sort of partisan spirit, calling the other side "Dockers." Mr. Pickwick, when he arrived, affected to give himself out as being on Slumkey's side because he knew his solicitor. And both were in a debtors' prison.

Once Dr. Johnson said, "You are frightened by what is no longer dangerous, like Presbyterians by Popery," and repeated a passage from Butler which ends thus, "and would cry, 'Fire! fire!' in Noah's flood." It will be recalled how, when Mr. Pickwick fell through the ice, his friend Tupman set off up the country, shouting "Fire! fire!" as the most appropriate way, etc.

Most curious likeness of all is the scene when, during some festivity in the Highlands, a pretty young married lady came up to Johnson and gave him a kiss. In like manner at Manor Farm during Christmas Mr. Pickwick was rushed at by all the ladies and summarily kissed.

I don't know whether one scene would instantly suggest a scene from "Pickwick" to the reader. It does to me, and at least has the flavour and atmosphere of a certain scene at Birmingham. This was Mr. Pickwick's arrival with his two

drunken friends in that city, and his calling on the old wharfinger at night.

Bozzy's exhibition in the matter of the Doctor's nightcap was truly absurd, and, being before company, irritated him exceedingly. It was during the Scotch tour; the company were gathered round, and the "follower," wishing to start something that would "set off" his chief, hit on this unlucky topic. He pressed him: "Why, sir, do you not wear a nightcap?" The Doctor answered him roughly and scoffingly; the poor questioner was loudly laughed at; a "foolish question," the Doctor said it was, and that no one in the world before the previous querist had thought of wanting to know why people did or did not wear nightcaps. It will be recollected that a good deal turned on Mr. Pickwick's nightcap: and who will forget it in the double-bedded room or in the Fleet?

It will be recollected too, that that would-be gay dog Tupman, in spite of his corpulency, on entering Wardle's house, where he was a stranger, ran off after one of the pretty maids—a gross violation of good manners; only, he fared worse than Bozzy.

We may even find that the Doctor had his Jingle, who attempted to make him his victim, and who in his turn succeeded in baffling his attempts. Sam Foote—yet another Sam—may be considered to have filled this character. He was humorous in discourse, an adventurer, always in

scrapes and difficulties, shut up in the debtors' prison, and an actor. When insulted by Jingle, Mr. Pickwick, it will be recollected, "hurled an inkstand" after him; and when Foote announced that he would mimic the Doctor on the stage, the latter brought a cudgel with which to beat him off it.

As another odd coincidence, it may be worth noting that Boswell's brother and Dickens's father were both employed in the same public office—viz., the Navy Pay Department. These are but fanciful speculations, after all, but the likeness is interesting enough.

We can see from the modern memoirs, collections, diaries, etc., now pouring from the Press, how imperfectly their writers understand how to describe the incidents they have to relate. They seem ignorant of the art of selection, the knowledge of what is essential. I myself, who am always reading—nay, devouring—memoirs, old and new, can note this extraordinary contrast, and can affirm from experience that Boswell is supreme. None, save perhaps the French, can relate personal incidents with the true proportion. Let anyone read Thiébauld's Napoleonic Recollections, and he will note the delightful ease, lack of affectation, and good-humour, which distinguish it and many more of the kind. Our moderns have not this light touch nor this sense of due proportion. Had

any one of them been furnished with Boswell's stock of manuscript material, anecdotes, etc., we should have had them set forth with a due weight and gravity, with solemn descriptions and comments. The almost slang phrase "touch and go" has a deeper meaning than is commonly supposed; for there are many trifles that one need merely allude to—*effleurer*, as the French have it—and then pass on.

But Bozzy tells his tale with a placid enjoyment, without strain or exertion, and with supreme reserve. There is no waste or piling up of words; everything is calm and natural. It is no exaggeration to say that he was singularly gifted in this way, and, by a happy chance, as I have said, he was exactly fitted to be the chronicler of the Johnsonian humours.

One of the most interesting revelations of Boswell's motley character is the fashion in which on every opportunity he takes care to disclose to us his own cherished thoughts and feelings. These take the form of little meditations and speculations, exhibiting his own favourite "dreams" or "pet fancies" which have often passed through his mind, and which he indulged in at stray moments. These are upon all subjects—religion, reminiscences of past scenes, reflections on important and interesting matters—but all tinged with his own peculiar fancies. He stops and puts aside altogether his



WIT AND WISDOM.

“So far as wisdom and wit can be aided by administering agreeable sensations to the palate, my wife took care that our great guest should not be deficient.” — *Boswell's Journal*.

great chief and his doings, and turns to supply a picture of himself and his feelings as a contribution to his own autobiography. These revelations excite our interest in his amiable nature. The whole makes quite a picture.

“As we sailed along by moonlight, in a sea somewhat rough, and often between black and gloomy rocks, Dr. Johnson said: ‘If this be not roving among the Hebrides, nothing is.’ The repetition of words which he had often used made a strong impression on my imagination, and by a natural course of thinking led me to consider how our present adventures would appear to me at a future period. I have often experienced that the scenes through which a man has passed improve by lying in memory; they grow mellow. This may be owing to comparing them with present listless ease. Even harsh memories acquire a softness by length of time, and some are like very loud sounds, which do not please, or at least do not please so much, till you are removed to a certain distance. They may be compared to strong, coarse pictures, which will not bear to be viewed near. Even pleasing scenes improve by time, and seem more exquisite in recollection than when they were present, if they have not faded to dimness in the memory. Perhaps there is so much lost in every human enjoyment, so much dross mixed with it, that it requires to be refined by time; and yet I do

not see why time should not melt away the good and the evil in equal proportions, why the shade should not decay and the light remain in equal proportions." All which is charming, spoken from the very heart, and expressed with equal grace and truth.

There is much in all this to redeem Bozzy's many failings, for here he shows himself truly genuine. But where does his great friend come in? Are not such things, however pleasing, outside the Doctor's biography?

Yes, Boswell's was a feeling, affectionate heart, that could express its emotions without the least affectation, and at the same time set past scenes before us in a perfectly artistic way. Nothing shows this better than his description of an entertainment at the Adelphi given by Mrs. Garrick—the first after her husband's death. The whole is sketched with the utmost delicacy and natural feeling. I never cross its Terrace without glimpses of Boswell's account rising before me.

"On Friday, April 20" [1781], says the enthusiastic chronicler, "I spent with him one of *the happiest days that I remember to have enjoyed in the whole course of my life*. Mrs. Garrick, whose grief for the loss of her husband was, I believe, as sincere as wounded affection and admiration could produce, had this day, for the first time since his death, a select party of his friends to dine with her :"

a pleasing and right fashion of commemorating the dead, and so properly understood by Boswell. The party consisted of the Doctor and his aide; Hannah More, whom Mrs. Garrick called her chaplain; Mrs. Boscawen, Mrs. E. Carter, Sir J. Reynolds, Dr. Burney. "We found ourselves very elegantly entertained at her house, where I have passed many a pleasing hour with one 'who gladdened life.' She looked well, talked of her husband with complacency, and, while she cast her eyes on his portrait which hung over the chimneypiece, said that 'death was now the most agreeable object to her.' 'The very semblance of Garrick was cheering.'"

How pleasantly confidential is Boswell in all these little details, just introduced *en passant*, as it were, and giving movement to his story! "We were all in fine form," he goes on, "and I whispered to Mrs. Boscawen, 'I believe this is as much as can be made of life.' In addition to a splendid entertainment, we were regaled with Lichfield ale, which had a peculiar appropriate value. Dr. Burney and I drank cordially to Dr. Johnson's health, and he, although he would not join us as cordially, answered: 'Gentlemen, I wish you all as well as you do me.' The general effect of this day dwells upon my mind in fond remembrance."

Many of us will recall feelings of this kind associated with the past, though we lack Boswell's graceful, natural power to record them, when a soft,

sweet, indistinct cloud seems to hover over all that is gone.

A large party came in the evening, when a pleasant little comedy was played, though quite unintended—that is, when the Doctor burst in on them with his “bottom of sense.” But through all do we not see that it is Boswell who supplied the interpretation, the notes, the sentiment? *He* lays on the tints; we hardly think of the Sage.

Dickens had much of this gracious, tender feeling of retrospect as he called up memories of his childhood—the delightful Christmas celebrations at Dingley Dell and other places, for example.

“He and I walked away together. We stopped a little while by the rails of the Adelphi, looking on the Thames; and I said to him, with some emotion, that I was now thinking of two friends we had lost, who once lived in the buildings behind us—Beauclerk and Garrick. ‘Ay, sir,’ said he tenderly, ‘and two such friends as cannot be supplied.’”

Boswell had an extraordinary gift of setting before one the general tone and atmosphere of a place, with the characters who filled the scene. Thus, he would go to some country town on a visit, and completely bring back its peculiar flavour. Dickens also had this gift; witness his pictures of Rochester and Bath, which are truly remarkable for their vitality and distinctness. An ordinary person

might be more abundant, and even exhaustive, in details, but would fail to convey the local characteristics. In this way, how admirable and delightful was the account of his visit to Ashbourne! How animated and genial it is, and how vividly drawn the characters!—Dr. Taylor, the burly, mundane Vicar, is put in with many admirable touches. There is something of an almost Pickwickian freedom in his treatment.

How often will those who have been on a visit to a house in or near some country town have been impressed by the novel and interesting impressions of such places—the old-fashioned inn, the local characters, and their simplicity and kindliness! Such will recognize how admirably and picturesquely Boswell has caught and limned, as it were, the tone of the Ashbourne visit. How prettily, for instance, and how vivaciously, can he sketch little trivial incidents! He makes an acute and very shrewd remark, which is worth storing up and putting away for use: “I felt a pleasure in walking about Derby, such as I always have in walking about any town to which I am not accustomed. There is an immediate sensation of novelty; and one speculates on the way in which life is passed in it, which, although there is a sameness everywhere upon the whole, is yet minutely diversified. The minute diversities in everything are wonderful.”

These personal rhapsodies, as they may be called, into which he was constantly breaking forth, have no connection whatever with any known rules of biography, though they find their proper place in autobiography—as in the case of his grand protest on behalf of his wife, which rivals Elijah Pogram's famous outburst.

During his stay with Dr. Taylor, Boswell seems to have fallen into a state of special exuberance or extravagance, owing to his happy state of feeling; he himself being a pleasant addition for the elderly pair, one of whom was always talking of bullocks, and therefore welcomed so mercurial and entertaining a visitor. Bozzy, thus feeling his own value and importance, evidently exerted himself to please.

The description of the varied scenes that occurred at this place is full of life and colour. It is, indeed, the best portion of the book. So vivid is the whole account, that when I visited Ashbourne I seemed to recognize everything, particularly the tranquil tone, and kept saying to myself, "Surely I must have been here before." One of Bozzy's happy words of description is "luminous," applied to the church—and so it is.

One scene is admirable for its simplicity and picturesqueness. After Bozzy had worshipped one Sunday in this large "luminous" church, he makes this odd reflection: "I felt great satisfaction in

considering that I was supported in my fondness for solemn public worship by the general concurrence and munificence of mankind." Of course, it was not of much moment to the reader that Mr. Boswell was satisfied with the public approval; but he felt it necessary to register his own feeling, and appeal to the general sense.

This sense of the charm of past scenes was shown in an engaging fashion in his account of this visit, lighted up with more and yet more rumination—all personal and introspective.

“One morning after breakfast, when the sun shone bright, we walked out together, and ‘pored’ for some time with placid indolence upon an artificial waterfall, which Dr. Taylor had made by building a strong dyke of stone across the river behind the garden. It was now somewhat obstructed by branches of trees and other rubbish which had come down the river and settled close to it. Johnson, partly from a desire to see it play more freely, and partly from that inclination to activity which will animate, at times, the most inert and sluggish mortal, took a long pole which was lying on a bank, and pushed down several parcels of this wreck with painful assiduity, while I stood quietly by, *wondering to behold the Sage thus curiously employed, and smiling with a humorous satisfaction each time when he carried his point.* He worked till he was quite out of breath; and

having found a large dead cat so heavy that he could not move it after several efforts, ‘Come,’ said he (throwing down the pole), ‘*you* shall take it now:’ which I accordingly did, and, being a fresh man, soon made the cat tumble over the cascade.”

There is a sort of dramatic feeling here, and it is brilliantly touched off; though all about a trifle, how vividly it comes before us! He himself adds:

“This may be laughed at as too trifling to record; but it is a small characteristic trait in the Flemish picture which I give of my friend, and in which, therefore, I mark the most minute particulars. And let it be remembered that ‘Æsop at play’ is one of the most instructive apologues of antiquity.”

But as to this matter of trivialities, our chronicler can justify himself in his own persuasive fashion:

“I cannot allow any fragment whatever that floats in my memory concerning the great subject of this work to be lost. Though a small particular may appear trifling to some, it will be relished by others; while every little spark adds something to the general blaze: and to please the true, candid, warm admirers of Johnson, and in any degree increase the splendour of his reputation, I bid defiance to the shafts of ridicule, or even of malignity. Showers of them have been discharged at my ‘Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides’; yet it

still sails unhurt along the stream of time, and, as an attendant upon Johnson,

‘Pursues the triumph and partakes the gale.’”

Here we may observe how adroitly he introduces Johnson, then puts him aside and takes his place, offering a plea for his “Tour.”

One night, however, when some “gentlemen farmers” of musical tastes dropped in, we may suspect the bottle passed round rather freely, for Bozzy was roused to an unusual display of exuberance and absurdity.

They “entertained themselves and the company with a great number of tunes on the fiddle. Johnson desired to have ‘Let ambition fire thy mind’ played over again, and appeared to give a patient attention to it; though he owned to me that he was very insensible to the power of music. I told him that it affected me to such a degree as often to agitate my nerves painfully, producing in my mind alternate sensations of pathetic dejection, so that I was ready to shed tears; and of daring resolution, so that I was inclined to rush into the thickest part of the battle. ‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool.’”

This he sets down as though it were a very natural comment. Years later, when he was preparing his work, he was tempted to introduce his views on music:

“Much of the effect of music, I am satisfied, is owing to the association of ideas. That air which instantly and irresistibly excites in the Swiss, when in a foreign land, the *maladie du pais*, has, I am told, no intrinsic power of sound. And I know from my own experience that Scotch reels, though brisk, make me melancholy, because I used to hear them in my early years, at a time when Mr. Pitt called for soldiers ‘from the mountains of the North,’ and numbers of brave Highlanders were going abroad, never to return. Whereas the airs in ‘The Beggar’s Opera,’ many of which are very soft, never fail to *render me gay*, because they are associated with the warm sensations and high spirits of London.—This evening, while some of the tunes of ordinary composition were played with no great skill, my frame was agitated, and I was conscious of a generous attachment to Dr. Johnson, as my preceptor and friend, mixed with an affectionate regret that he was an old man, whom I should probably lose in a short time. I thought I could defend him at the point of my sword.”

Bozzy’s absurd rhapsody on music seems to have brought ridicule from the Sage and the “gentlemen farmers.” One can fancy the roar that came from the listeners.

Boswell, in his superior way, takes no notice. He actually thought that Johnson’s rude speech did

not apply to him at all; his readers knew him better. As the man in the play says, he might be an ass, but he was not "a silly ass." But though thus rebuffed, he at once turned to the reader to explain his real feeling about music, in more extravagant terms even. But here the reflection occurs in reference to our thesis—Which is made most prominent of the two opinions of music, Dr. Johnson's or Mr. Boswell's?

CHAPTER VII

SIXTH MOTOR FORCE—"REPORTING"

WE now come to yet another of the forces that helped Boswell to his supremacy over Johnson. His was no mere report of sayings and controversies, as is so commonly supposed, but a great and elaborate system of *composition*, which only began when he had made his notes. When we stand admiring before Sir Joshua's noble portrait of Johnson in the National Gallery, we think more of the painter and of his skill than we do of Johnson; we marvel at the expression, the colouring, the touches—bold and delicate; and as we gaze on Boswell's portrait, we seem to admire his genius yet more than that of his great subject.

Who knew this better than Boswell himself? He could say with truth: "*Adsum qui feci*; I found all the material. From my memory or my invention I put in this bit of colour, this expression, I *Johnsonize*; when there were blank spaces, I put myself into his very mind, learned to look like him, to speak like him, to make him do as he would have done; I shaped, altered, and improved

his rough talk, gave point to it. Does not all this," he might ask, "fairly give me claim to a supremacy in the partnership? It is my *composition*." And, indeed, a person who had the power to set a friend talking, who could command and direct that talk, take down the substance of it, amend, alter, and improve it, put in passages which, as he conceived it, the friend *might* have spoken, must take a commanding position with reference to the person whom he deals with in this fashion.

Too much cannot be said of Boswell's admirable *style*. It is a model—clear and limpid, direct and unaffected, without any attempt at adornment. He simply says what he desires to say, and has at his command a number of expressive words and phrases, with plenty of humour and imagination. In this he suggests the immortal Sir Walter, who has the same clear, limpid, and agreeable touch. Some of his phrases are wonderfully expressive, and could not be surpassed by the regular professors. The reason of this success was his habit of communing with himself, and of analyzing his own and other folks' thoughts and humours. From daily practice, he gained a facility and variety of the utmost value.

As a letter-writer Boswell also commands our admiration. In this line he had a simple, clear style, always to the point and always illuminated by a sort of dramatic feeling, as though he put his

best into what he was writing. He had a different style according to the person he addressed. Thus, to Johnson he wrote with a sort of respectful restraint, but at the same time with free communication of his thoughts and feelings; the best illustration being his fully detailed account of his visits, in which he, with infinite pains, collected all the topics that would be interesting to his friend. Here he showed his devotion and good-nature. But his letters to his old friend Temple showed him at his best. Here he unbosomed himself, and in the most natural fashion gave him the very outpourings of his honest heart, everything that he felt, all his trespasses and failings, the most intimate confidences; while all is permeated with an intense affection and regard. It must really have been impossible not to love such a being. These letters are certainly strange "human documents"; not the least strange thing about them being their almost miraculous preservation. But we must always lament that the most interesting of the series—those of the years associated with Johnson's last illness and death—should be missing. They would certainly have thrown light on Boswell's strange and inexplicable behaviour at that crisis. He must certainly have told his friend what was the real grievance against the dying Johnson.

The secret of this happy mode of expression was his complete absence of affectation. He wished to

tell his story, and he went straight to his purpose, without thinking of how he should express himself. He enjoyed himself, too, as he wrote, and revelled in his clever sketches of men and things. He was chary of words, and had the maxim *Ne quid nimis* before him. The contrast with the performances of our day in this line is extraordinary. The average memoir seems a manufactured, artificial thing, in which the writer has no interest; the style is too often founded on that of the daily newspaper—a peculiar style, well suited to ephemeral things, but not to a book. Apart from Boswell's style, the impression left on the reader is that he is in the presence of a well-read, cultured gentleman. Nothing is more surprising than his familiarity with the out-of-the-way and little-known books, and with topics known to scholars only—though, as I have suggested, his lore may have been extended by after-reading and inquiry—in history and poetry especially—in three languages, English, French, and Italian. "All print was open to him," as Mr. Wegg remarked.

Unbounded as has been the admiration bestowed upon Boswell's all but fascinating history, on its pictures of manners and delineations of character, its sprightliness and animation, hardly sufficient notice has been given to that miracle of miracles, his method of securing, after delivery, the vast series of conversations which are the attraction

of the book. We are apt to think of him as simply a diligent note-taker, ever on the watch, capturing in some mysterious way the letter or substance of what he was listening to; or else as gifted with a wonderful, abnormal memory. We see him, note-book in hand, securing somehow—for he did not know shorthand—the bulk of the talk. But, then, do we not know that the common reporter must concentrate himself on his single duty without interruption or disturbance? He cannot stop for even a moment, or he will drop behind. And here comes the marvel—the miracle, as I have called it—Boswell *was himself talker and disputant* as well as reporter. He took an animated share in the discussion, he had to follow the thread of the argument, and to do this must listen to his adversaries. But if he had to write, how could he do this? It was really a monumental feat. He talked to his neighbours, made himself agreeable, ate and drank—which he did plentifully—yet the result was a natural, spirited report, infinitely more full than the very complete and perfect reports to which we are accustomed. How was this contrived? We shall find that the answer in the first place must be, that it was *not* done.

To start with, he was gifted with a good memory, which he had trained and improved by constant practice. He could marshal topics and fix them in his mind. Anyone familiar with the diplomatic

service has often read with amazement the report which an Envoy has sent home of his interviews with a foreign Minister—ten, perhaps half a dozen, pages long. He will give the whole conversation in dialogue, with all the delicate points and controversial distinctions, each topic placed in its proper order. It seems an astonishing feat enough. No doubt he took notes; but the finished result must be due to careful practice. And this, of course, was the basis of Boswell's system. Apart from this, however, he has himself furnished us with many details. It is plain that, at a dinner-party, the spectacle of one of the guests with an open note-book, busily engaged in jotting down what the guests were saying, would be found intolerable and would spoil the party. There would be serious restraint, and some certainly might object to having their words taken down. It is clear, therefore, that the note-taking was not observable. In process of time, however, when the intimacy between the pair was notorious, it became well understood that with the Doctor was always to be asked his "follower" or aide-de-camp. This is certain from the innumerable entries: "I dined with him this day at a Bishop's," etc. And thus Mr. Boswell became privileged. Still, it is clear that he had contrived some *disguised* way of taking down what he heard.

Speaking of his methods to Dr. Johnson, he explained that he knew nothing of shorthand, but

could set down "half-words," leaving out some altogether, "*so as to keep the substance and language of any discourse I heard so much in view that I could give it very completely soon after taking it down.*" This is a very complete and accurate account of Bozzy's system, and it is quite intelligible. The catchwords suggested not only other words, but sentences; for the word he selected was representative, as in the case of Johnson's vivid sayings. With long practice one could learn this "art of suggestion" and develop it. A test which Johnson once put to him curiously reveals to us the truth of what I have said as to this amplifying from his own stores the right utterances. Johnson dictated to him some of Robertson's History, which the other failed to reproduce—he says, because the effect depended on "the studied arrangement of words." But it was really owing to the fact that, after he had taken down the talk, he was accustomed to transcribe it into his "Johnsonese," and enrich it, on the principle of supplying what Johnson would have said or was likely to have said. Boswell had so much imagination that he could restore for himself the whole scene, or episodes of the scene, with their general effect, secured by the catchwords. In short, it was a matter of training and discipline.

Bozzy must have had in view the system which Johnson himself followed when composing the

debates in Parliament which he expanded in his own special Johnsonese from a few descriptive sketches furnished by a listener. No doubt by practice he had attained to some secret method of taking his notes behind the shelter of someone, by "screwing himself round" in some fashion. Miss Burney has left a vivacious sketch of him when thus engaged, where she says he rather ostentatiously pursued his work, drawing his chair closer and yet closer to the Sage until he was ordered away. No doubt, when he had "primed" himself sufficiently with the glass, he cast off all pretence and disguise. But even the carrying on of this matter so successfully shows an extraordinary ability and boldness. For he carried it through for over twenty years, without check or hindrance, apparently with the sanction and approbation of all.

How, too, did the Club tolerate this system—a number of gentlemen in private allowing a member to take down all they said, of the most private kind? Had he given his word that he would not divulge? And how strange if the members had given him leave and licence! These are mysteries.

With his "half" or "catch" words and his powerful memory, Boswell brought home from the party material for a full report. And here he found all his resources. He explains to us one of the secrets. From talking to his great friend

morning, noon, and night, from listening to his periods on every subject, he had grown, as it were, into his mind, and could project himself into all his favourite forms of speech. He could in a minute translate a sentence into a language that he called *Johnsonese*—that is, could think after the pattern of Johnson, thinking and saying some sentence almost as Johnson would have said it. He did that by instinct as it were, or habit, and so as to furnish a whole dialogue under his clever process. Thus, when they talked of Berkeley's theories, of matters which Johnson "refuted thus" by striking his stick on the ground, Boswell would readily throw it into dramatic form by supplying remarks of his own and imaginary answers based on the *spirit* of the Sage's sayings. But, as I said, to imagine that these hundreds of talks, questions, replies, etc., were all given in their due order and with their *ipsissima verba* is incredible, and would be a feat the like of which the world has never seen.

A great dramatist in this way finds himself carrying on a spirited, witty dialogue, not one word of which was known to him ten minutes before! And so Boswell, knowing his Johnson by heart, could deal with him after the fashion of one of those quaint ventriloquists at the music-halls who keep up a conversation with a little toy figure seated on their knees.

But let us see Boswell at his work, and follow

him home, when, full of wine and excitement, he runs over his notes, and calls up, as it then was not difficult to do, the dramatic positions, incidents, "good things," of the evening. In the morning he goes more coolly and deliberately to work; he remembers some pointed sayings of the leader which he had fixed in his memory, amusing situations and encounters, even the very words.

This marvellous Johnsonese "lingo" he could at any moment call up and listen to. Johnson had been "laying about him"; he had uttered some of his tremendous retorts, which Bozzy had retained and "booked" with a catchword or two. He had heard the dialogue; he recalled the situation, and found it easy to throw the whole into conversational shape.

But, then, how easy, how irresistible, was the next stage! With this inspiration, and the pressure of the scene still vivid, he might have found himself actually in the act of composition, like a dramatist. Here was a theme suggested by one of his notes—how natural that he should develop good Johnsonian sayings, or that sayings in the Johnsonian manner should occur to him; that he should heighten here, put in some pleasant strokes that occurred to him there! He would think: "What a pity I did not say that!" (*l'esprit de l'escalier*); "but I can put it in now." I am certain that something of the kind occurred, and was

always occurring, and that the irresistible desire to amend and expand and put in his own ideas in this way was uncontrollable. It was only human nature, with such a canvas before him and no one to check him.

But it will be said that, on this theory, Bozzy must have been as great and powerful a talker as his master. No, for he would seem to have first set down his text and then *Johnsonized* his additions. With his own utterances he had an open field; he could range where he liked. A man of Boswell's character, full of devices, seeking every opening to put himself forward, would not for a scruple pass by such an opportunity. He was likely to write and rewrite, not only what he said, but what he had *never* said. If he were in an argument, he would furnish himself afresh with powerful topics, be ready with quotations revised *à loisir*, quoting proper passages of poetry which had occurred to him "on the staircase." He could show himself as learned, critical, equipped at all points. Who could resist such a temptation? And so it is generally: if a proof be sent to a public man of his speech or essay, he will not scruple to half rewrite or alter it, putting it forward as though it were what he had really said. In short, this dilemma must be faced: it is literally impossible for Boswell to have presented anything like a record of what was said, because it is impossible for him to have recollected

or "taken" it all. Yet it is there all the same, and therefore must have been supplied from Bozzy's own brain—duly Johnsonized.

So this leads to a question of extraordinary interest which may by-and-by have an immense influence on Boswell's reputation. I do not venture it save in a very speculative way, but it will have to be considered. The point is this: *Had Boswell, after all, an important share in devising the sayings, apophthegms, retorts, etc., which have been always attributed to Johnson?* It seems a rather daring thing even to suggest such a thing, but it does look very much as though Bozzy had "co-operated" in writing many of the conversations.

What a wonderful feat, if this clever man had paid this tribute to his own cleverness! But this proceeding he could get no credit for, for he dared not impart his secret to anyone, or his book would lose all its credit. And yet he knew it was a true version of what had occurred; and if he manipulated it, he was in the secret of Johnson's feelings and intentions. Boswell intended for himself the general office of controller and director of the talk, and he also intended to impress this opinion on the public. Just as there used to be the "managed" horse in the old days, so was there to be a "managed" Johnson, under his friend's direction. This is proved by Bozzy's allowing nothing to pass

without his acceptance or rejection; without his approval or his protest; without his inauguration or termination; without his correction or endorsement. Boswell gave his own opinions boldly, his dislikes and likings; he set the wrong right, and showed the disputants where they had gone astray. All his own feelings, prejudices, likings, dislikings, are set forth. This surely, then, becomes an almost personal narrative. Amid all this noting and reporting—the animated talk, the hurried, noisy persons talking together, the loud laughter, Boswell himself perhaps is noisiest. He picks up snatches of Johnson's wit—how he set down this one and that; how he retorted and produced a roar of applause. These things and the encircling scene he had no need to record; he had only to trust his memory. It was only in the case of a discussion that he had to write a catchword or two. He may have also noted the order of the topics. When he reached home he began to write at length and put things in order, and then to Johnsonize—that is, he let his imagination loose. He called up the scene of the particular episode, he heard again the contending voices, he remembered—though he may have forgotten the words—the *effect* of the words, the behaviour of the parties, as in the case of Johnson's dispute with Bishop Percy. Suppose that we had read out to us, say on a first acquaintance, some highly dramatic scene, to which we had

listened with interest and enjoyment. Next day, when called upon to write down or describe what we can recollect, if at all shrewd, we shall find ourselves working very much as Boswell did. We shall recall the scene vividly, and many of the words; *e.g.*, we could not forget that the quarrel arose from Percy taxing the Doctor with his imperfect sight. Also "I travelled after him." "And *I* travelled also." And then we should recall Johnson's taunt that Percy resented reflection on the Northumberland family, and remember the words "narrow-mindedness."

Next comes Bozzy's Johnsonizing process, which raises some intricate questions, the chief of which is, How far was it carried? Where did it stop? What did it literally mean? I think we can reach an answer, which is, indeed, the only answer. He tells us that he had learned the art of putting phrases into a sort of "adumbration" of Johnson's talk—that is, given a thought or a sentence, he could say it almost exactly as Johnson would have said it. But he went beyond this. He could enter, as it were, into Johnson's mind, and make up successive sentences which should represent the current of the Doctor's thoughts; knowing as it were prophetically how the ideas would succeed each other, how the Sage to a certainty would treat the topic. He had all the little "tricks" at his fingers' ends, could put in the "Why, no, sir's," "Nay, sir's," etc., where

they were wanted. From his incessant practice it had become quite an easy feat. He seemed to hear Johnson speak, and let his pen race on.

A person well accustomed to this intimate journalism acquires an amazing fluency, and a quite vivid manner of putting the scene before the reader. I myself, during my long life, have been a perpetual, diligent note-taker of what the French call *choses vues*, and have learned to call them up in very realistic way and in very few phrases; setting down a talk, I find myself assuming the tone, manner, mind, which seem to be dictating to me. This is a mere matter of practice and habit, not of special skill, so the reader may take it from me—*ex-perto crede*. On the same evidence he may be assured that there will come a wonderful fertility of invention. I find myself making ready and appropriate replies—to which I seem to have listened.

And how many of us in our own homes have had experiences of this kind! We see two sprightly animated daughters returning home after dining at a large party, and eager to amuse their mother with a full account. They will sit up to “all hours” telling her about it. Natural good-will and a sense of enjoyment prompt their wits; they describe the scenes, ridiculous and otherwise, report absurd speeches, with the very tones and manner of the speaker, and all they said—often not only

the substance, but the literal words: they call up the whole scene with immense spirit. But, as I can testify, in their *gaieté de cœur* they will fill out and heighten—shall I say exaggerate?—or invent drolleries which we listeners recognize as true, or almost true, because they fit the individual characters.

Once again, how much of the innumerable talks with Johnson and others is of *Boszy's own composition and devising*? Could his report be a faithful or literal one? Impossible. We can fancy that he memorized and set down the topics in the proper order—the beginning of the subject, Johnson's odd expressions. He has told us that from practice he could write a sort of “Johnsonese” language. Now, this was a dangerous gift, because it must have tempted him every moment to clothe his own ideas and fill up sentences with what would be telling and dramatic, so as to produce an effect. When Johnson used a simile, he would strengthen it by substituting something more striking, as it seemed to him, while retaining the form. And thus the conclusion becomes irresistible, that the reporter had a really important share in all these mighty dialogues. It must also be remembered that Boswell was not a very scrupulous person. He almost preferred “roundabout” methods to a straightforward course.

But this theory of a personal share in the author-

ship of the conversation is fully supported by Boswell's own notes, which in a small way show his process. Thus, when he found some particular point a little weak, he would alter the form of illustration to one invented by himself, but retaining the shape, as being more dramatic.

While offering these suggestions, I must not be taken as seriously contending that Boswell wrote all these profound and clever disquisitions. That would really make him as great a genius as Johnson himself. But my theory is the only solution of the many difficulties. His Johnsonese tongue actively kindled his memory, and supplied him from his storehouse of Johnsonian words and phrases—even his varied casts of thought. Again, he knew Johnson's opinions on most things.

If he used this treatment in trifling matters, how likely that he would adopt the same system with the larger canvas of the conversations! At the same time, I have no doubt that he recalled perfectly—*literatim et verbatim*—each one of Johnson's pointed sayings, repeating them and fixing them in his memory. Round them he arranged the conversations with such fragments as he recalled, embellishing them in his own way. If we think of it, we shall see that the dramatic incidents—say Johnson's rude attacks on Goldsmith, Percy, or Reynolds—needed no effort to recall. Had any of us been present, we could have described the

scene accurately and readily, because the words were striking and dramatic enough to fix themselves in the memory.

Here is another interesting question. Boswell must have come to the Johnsonian talks prepared with subjects, questions, interesting matter of all kinds, for he never seemed to flag. To do this he must have been wonderfully clever. Of a foolish though flashy person one soon tires. Johnson would have been bored to death with mere private duets. Did he ever say: "Do stop your chattering, for Heaven's sake!" (Still, we could hardly expect Bozzy to tell us if he did.)

Johnson was of so downright and robust a type that it is difficult to conceive of him submitting to long intercourse with one greatly inferior to himself. He must at last have found this being probed and questioned at all seasons an intolerable burden, and must often have wished to dissolve the connection altogether. Well, as it seems to me, he often did so. For thus may be accounted for those rude and gross insults which he levelled at Bozzy before company—those "degrading images" of which the latter complains. This "before company" was the element most likely to inflame Bozzy. Then, too, the perpetual talk and worrying! He no doubt, to a certain extent, primed himself carefully with suitable topics, but he seems to suggest that every discussion arose naturally out of the situation.

And we may have a suspicion that, with his fluent gift of talk, Boswell must often have given free play to his imagination, and developed topics in his own lively and dramatic fashion. But he was not to be insulted, and yet could not accept all without complaint. Then probably Johnson became sorry, and the alliance was renewed. It must be considered also that the Doctor must have been rather vain of having a creature so completely devoted to him—his serf as it were, whom he could take about and exhibit, and who brought him news and gossip and ran his errands. He had grown accustomed to him, and would miss his service. And then the talk, the wonder, which the dissolution of the partnership would excite!

If this view be disputed, we have only to turn to Boswell's own notes, where we find his various stories and "good things" shaped and altered for better effect. There is one alteration which is most significant. Johnson, to illustrate the futility of Sheridan's teaching elocution, said it was like lighting a candle. It seemed that this was not very pointed, or, at least, not pointed enough. How much more forcible to make it Dover and Calais, the ocean being between! This fashion of improving, altering, and strengthening, might tempt him yet further, and lead him to expand the dialogue with remarks of his own, and thus proceed to all lengths of improvisation.

Boswell, not having had the advantage of meeting Johnson one year, contrived to buttonhole the good-natured Langton, who handed over to him a collection of "Dicta and Sayings," chiefly critical, and conceived in a rather ponderous vein. Boswell apologizes for Langton, saying that he was not in the habit of writing down things; but he (Boswell) adroitly seized on the occasion, as it were, to "pump," leading the talk to "stories" of the stage much more in his way. This he did on many occasions, taking down the pith and marrow in his note-book. Then he adds this significant passage: "The authenticity of every article is unquestionable"—*i.e.*, because the note was taken at the time of utterance. "For the expression"—we should mark this, as it belongs to his system—"I am partly answerable;" that is, he translated them into his favourite *Johnsonese*, and skilfully embellished them.

There is one rather significant incident which seems to throw a little light on the matter. He had given an elaborate report of a long discussion, in which a Quaker lady, Mrs. Knowles, took part. The Quaker lady some three years later published a printed account of the talk, which is a plain matter-of-fact statement and arrangement, without any of Bozzy's lively flourishings. The latter was indignant and scornful at this, and declared that he had not the least recollection of her version, and that there was not a trace of it in his record. He

accordingly refused to have anything to do with it. If Boswell had adopted his method of "Johnsonizing," and making his hero talk as he was accustomed to talk, the two accounts must have been quite discordant. Now, it is rather arbitrary to assume that here Bozzy had the monopoly of accuracy. May not the lady's version have been the right one? Boswell may not have been attending at the time, and there may have been other interruptions.

Boswell often innocently laments how much he had lost by neglecting to report an interesting evening—"for some reason or other," he says. In the morning, too, he could not recover the details. This was, of course, due to an obvious reason.

On one occasion, when he was dining with Sir Joshua Reynolds, there was a very large company and a great deal of conversation. Here were elements for a grand garnering-up of reported talk. But Bozzy naïvely tells us that, "owing to some circumstances *which I cannot now recollect*, I have no report of any part of it." How naïve is this confession! The reason doubtless was that the guest found the wine so good and his tongue so free that he could not attend to other matters.

Sometimes he took a fit of neglecting his duties altogether for weeks, when much was lost. Boswell's extraordinary theory was that anything that he took down in his note-book was sacrosanct, as it

were, and not to be altered or tampered with. The general rule has always been that letters or talks are strictly private things, and not to be put in print unless carefully revised and purged of all personalities. The writers or talkers are entitled to protection, and hold a sort of copyright. Subject to this treatment, and then only, they may become public papers. What secured Boswell his astonishing impunity was the bold and wholesale scale on which his revelations were made ; where everybody without exception was treated in the same fashion, no one was inclined to come forward. They were bewildered. Even when the revelations are colourless and harmless, no one likes to have his careless, casual remarks put in print. They have a sort of banal or childish air, because they are too trivial to be reported.

But on the whole Bozzy's exploit is simply unique for its defiance of all restraint and decency, and also for its complete success.

It was, of course, well known that Bozzy was "taking down" private conversations ; but though he was never given credit for discretion, it was expected that fear of consequences would make him careful. Nothing of the kind. Everything was blurted out—offensive remarks about living persons ; stories, true and untrue, about friends, with remarks of theirs upon other people ; scandals. And yet he escaped without duels, or horse-

whippings, or any very serious quarrel. This is one of the miracles associated with the book. Even when, stung by Wolcot's ridicule, he called him a profane jester, nothing inconvenient followed.

Indeed, the wonder is how, with the interruptions, the deep drinking, the slow recovery the next day, he managed to make progress at all. He complains bitterly of the unceasing labour, the confused mass of written material he had to search through to get into order, the trouble in looking up dates, etc. It is really wonderful, with such difficulties, what an orderly, business-like structure he reared. He seemed to the manner born, a practised editor. Not but that there were strange entanglements, bits of confusion here and there, index at the beginning instead of at the end, etc.

Boswell was, in fact, saturated with Johnson. He had been listening to him for twenty years "off and on," and his retentive mind had become, as he said himself, "impregnated with the Johnson ether"—happy phrase!—a sort of museum of Johnsonian "odds and ends," sayings and thoughts on all subjects, a storehouse from which he could help himself on occasion. We can well fancy him, when supplied with a suitable text, improvising a dramatic dialogue, extending and carrying on the discussion with his extraordinary faculty, and finding amusement in talking with

himself *à la Johnson*. But here comes a fresh difficulty. To do this in the masterly fashion with which it has been carried out, must not Boswell have been a second Johnson, with all his ability and power? And this Bozzy was certainly not. Yet, what other resource is there, in the face of the insolvable puzzle of how these admirable dialogues *could* have been taken down, unless by some miraculous agency; for, as we have seen, Bozzy only took a stray note or catchword, whereas the printed record has the finish and completeness of a professional's work. So, of the two difficulties, it seems the more easy to accept as a solution that of actual composition—in part at least.

I have now given a lengthy disquisition on this thorny question, which I think has been looked at from every point of view, and on the whole fairly dealt with. It is clear, at least, that the difficulties have hitherto been too lightly dealt with—that Boswell's simple statement that he could write in Johnson's manner was accepted as a complete explanation—amounting to this, that he merely "touched up" his slender reflections and recollections with Johnson's colouring.

CHAPTER VIII

SEVENTH MOTOR FORCE—FINAL QUARREL

THERE are many things in this investigation which I fear must shock all faithful Johnsonians and Boswellians. And there is one painful and tragic matter which I am going, with all hesitation, to put forward, but which could only occur to one who had gone searchingly into all the long relations of the pair—and that is, “Did Boswell feel to the last that love and devotion for his great friend which he so often and so ostentatiously professed to feel? The degradations to which he was subjected, the insolence, the contempt, the almost menial services which he was compelled to accept, the insults to which he was publicly exposed—is it likely that a sensitive, mercurial spirit such as was his would patiently endure this treatment without finding all reverence, veneration, and regard gradually waning, and finally becoming extinct! It will be said that the *Life* to the very end shows an uninterrupted profession of affection and devotion; but these professions were contemporaneous, written in the heyday of their intimacy, and entered

at the time they occurred. They did not represent his final judgment. No average man could put up with such a system of treatment without a growing rage and resentment. And are we to expect that Bozzy, who rarely forgot an affront, who "gave as good as he got," and whose book shows his resentment against all who had offended him, would have a gentle indulgence for his ungracious patron? He was a sensitive creature, and must have felt acutely the public degradations to which Johnson seemed to delight in subjecting him.

It should be remembered that on several occasions Johnson's insulting treatment almost passed Bozzy's endurance. On one occasion he did not go near him for several days. And there must have been many a time when he may have asked whether the endurance was worth the suffering that it brought him. There are some things which suggest, or seem to hint, that Johnson grew somewhat tired of his friend. After the visit to the Hebrides, Johnson made a trip to Wales; but there was no Boswell! He went also to France. Then came the proposal to go to Italy. In none of these expeditions was Bozzy asked to join. He was not even *told* of the French expedition. But why did he not offer to go with the Doctor to Italy, to take care of him and look after him? Is it not likely that, if the Doctor was a tremendous companion, the follower was a "boring" one? There

must have been many a day when the pair were heartily tired of each other.

But too much had been invested—in the case of Bozzy, at least—for him to break up the friendship: and the Sage was nearing his end. A little more patience, and he would have his reward. Johnson may at times have felt that he lost dignity and respect by suffering the ever *adhesive* attendance of this grotesque personage; but he had grown necessary to him, as a sort of *souffre-douleur*. So he let it go on.

There is yet another incident which seems highly significant of Bozzy's changed feelings towards Johnson. When they were at Auchinleck, Bozzy told him, in a moment of *épanchement de cœur*, that if he survived him he would set up a column in the grounds commemorative of him. After the Sage's death we might have expected to hear of this memorial. But not so. No column was ever erected to the man who would not leave him even an old book. It is also a little significant that, after Johnson had allotted his friend a room in his house, we find Bozzy a short time later required to give it up.

One often wonders what people of that society must have said or thought when they saw Boswell, a Scotch laird of condition, "set down" with coarse brutality, as we must call it, by the great man. To us it is inconceivable. Who could

imagine, when it was debated how a friend ought to be got out of London, someone suggesting, "we must put you beside him, and then he will fly"? Or when steam is praised as a curative agent, what would be thought of another saying, "Well, get the steam directed to your head, for *there* is the weak place"? this at a dinner or before a large company. Or the giving as an excuse for excessive drinking, "if he sat next to *you*"? There would be silence; everyone would be aghast at such rudeness; it would be difficult to resume the talk. We may ask, did Bozzy deepen the strokes to produce an effect? For Johnson boasted that he was "a society man," one of breeding and manners, and he could hardly think that he was privileged to be thus boorish. It may be that he had *insinuated*—which he well knew how to do—these rude speeches under a satirical form.

The worst, most degrading of all the trials Boswell had to submit to from his august friend was as discreditable to the latter as to his victim. It seems all but incredible when we think that Johnson was a sage, a professional moralist and teacher, and professedly a good religious man. The scene was at Dunvegan, where Johnson was "laying down the law" on the comparative merits of linen and wool as wearing apparel. The latter, he said, was dirty material, being an animal substance. Everyone listened with rapt attention. "I

have often thought," he added, "that, if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns. I would have no silk," etc. It appears that no one of the company, save one, saw the grotesqueness of this hypothesis. Poor Boswell, always appreciating a humorous solution, was struck so forcibly with the ludicrous contrast that he "could not but laugh immoderately. Johnson was too proud to submit even for a moment to be the object of ridicule, and instantly retaliated with such keen, sarcastic wit, and *such a variety of degrading images, of every one of which* I was the object, that, though I can bear such attacks as well as" (far better than) "most men, I yet found myself so much the sport of the company that I would gladly expunge from my mind every trace of this severe retort."

How painful it is to read this! How unbecoming and how inhuman! For Johnson not a word can be said; it was a pitiable exhibition of vanity and human weakness. He could not for the time have had the true religious spirit. I once heard an eloquent preacher expatiating on religious life and discipline, when a woman was taken with sudden faintness. Everyone looked round. Our preacher grew angry and sarcastic. "*What* is it all about?" Then, scornfully: "It is *only* a poor girl who is a little overcome: there is nothing to be excited about." All this in the bitterest tone. They had

dared to withdraw their attention from him! I thought of the Doctor on this occasion.

But Boswell, poor Boswell! what sort of self-respect could he have had, to tamely endure such treatment? He ought to have *resigned* at once, until a suitable public apology was made to him. But no, he did not even *see* his humiliation.

I have always thought there is something sad, and even tragic, in the wreck of the friendship of these two eminent men. We have been following them all through their talks and adventures, have grown to love and admire them, to sympathize with their mutual regard, as between master and scholar, guardian and ward. It seemed built on a rock, for how many a storm had it borne unshaken! Of a sudden came one slight gust, and all lay in ruins! We can detect a tone of mortification and constraint in Bozzy's words as he strives to wind up his chronicle with an affected cheerfulness and heartiness.

For the studious, diligent English reader, who looks on all the notable figures he meets with in his reading as living friends and companions, there is no more cherished asset than the long intimacy between Dr. Johnson and his humble, faithful henchman and follower, James Boswell. In the popular view, their affectionate union was as apper-

ciated by each as it was interesting ; it had stood the test for some twenty years of much foolishness and absurdity on one side, and of gross insult and ungenerous ridicule on the other. We can admire the kindly tolerance of Johnson for one so unfitted to be his companion, and the wonderful patience and sweetness of temper which made Boswell put up with the coarse language which his patron—in fits of ill-humour—would shower upon him ; though the stream was only ruffled for a moment, and was soon placid again. All editors seem to agree on the point, and the pleasing legend is firmly established.

A close, searching study of the Life reveals to us, among other curious things, that the follower was not always so patient as he seemed, and that he was biding his time. That time was to arrive when his book appeared. I have tried to prove that Bozzy's object was to furnish a sort of *autobiography* of his own, in which his character, with its many-sidedness, his accomplishments, general learning, and critical power, were to be set forth to the fullest advantage. But another course of careful inquiry is this : that in the book are two distinct currents—one the report of all the conversations, taken about the time of their utterance, which represent Boswell's actual feeling at the moment ; the other when the whole manuscript was before him, and he was busy putting it into formal shape. The latter portion was

written six years after Johnson's death, and represents a hostile state of feeling towards Johnson : and with this his constant correction and pointing out of faults is to be connected.

And what a surprise for the "general reader," what a subversion of the accepted *clichés* and "common forms" of journalism, were it discovered that at the last the affectionate intimacy was a delusion, that it had no substance, and that it was of a sudden broken off and abolished on the spot. Yet so it was to fall out. For twenty years and more Boswell had lavished his affection on his friend, followed him like a dog—and sometimes had to accept the treatment of a dog. When he parted from him for the last time in 1784, it was with the extremest agitation and grief. "I accompanied him in Sir Joshua Reynolds's coach to the entry of Bolt Court. He asked me whether I would not go with him to his house; I declined it, from an apprehension that my spirits would sink. We bade adieu to each other affectionately in the carriage. When he had got down upon the foot-pavement, he called out, 'Fare you well!' and, without looking back, sprung away with a kind of *pathetic briskness* (if I may use that expression)"—and indeed he may, for it is an exceedingly happy one—"and which seemed to indicate a struggle to conceal uneasiness, and impressed me with a foreboding of our long-coming separation." This

was on the last day of June 1784; within six months the good old Doctor was gone.

After hearing this feeling outburst, which speaks of genuine grief at its being the natural close of twenty years of affection, who would not be astounded to learn that the faithful disciple,—whom the Doctor left almost in tears on that last parting,—of a sudden, after a *little over three weeks' interval*, took serious offence, and, after an almost frantic outburst, broke off all communication with him, remained unreconciled, in spite of piteous entreaties, till the very eve of the great man's death. Amazing! indeed, all but incredible!

This *dénouement* approached very rapidly. Some three weeks after their parting, Johnson wrote to him from Ashbourne, where he had joined his friend Dr. Taylor, a truly disastrous account of his state:

“I know that your kindness makes you impatient to know the state of my health, in which I cannot boast of much improvement. I came through the journey without much inconvenience, but when I attempt self-motion I find my legs weak, and my breath very short; this day I have been much disordered. I have no company; the Doctor is busy in his fields, and goes to bed at nine. . . . I have therefore all my amusement to seek within myself.”

How affectionate was this, and how manly and resigned! A letter from Boswell seems to have

crossed this one, which he does not give, but describes as being “filled with dejection and fretfulness, and at the same time expressing anxious apprehensions concerning him on account of a dream which had disturbed me.” Johnson replied in severe terms of rebuke ; it is a pity that Boswell does not give the letter entire, but, as he is already entering on his own vindication, its terms might not be suited for his case. He says “it was chiefly in *terms of reproach for a supposed charge of affecting discontent and indulging the vanity of discontent.*” But whatever may have been the character of the rebuke, there were passages that should have neutralized anything that was offensive. “*Write to me often, and write like a man.* I consider your fidelity and tenderness as a great part of the comforts that are left to me, and sincerely wish we could be nearer to each other.” (Here follow eight stars denoting omissions.) “My dear friend, life is very short ; let us spend it as well as we can. Love me as well as you can.” Then, referring to the dream : “Nothing ailed me at that time : let your superstition at last have an end.” In that truly affectionate expostulation it is clear that the Sage had used, as he had often done in severe terms, his privilege of giving cautionary reproofs and warnings to his erring charge, who had always accepted the rod with due meekness and gratitude. But the good Doctor, almost as soon as he had

despatched his letter, felt that he had been a little harsh; so he sent off a second, in which he detailed his "sufferings," as he was desired to do—then hoped his first letter would not be taken amiss, for "it contains only truth, and that truth kindly intended. . . ." (Here another omission.) "Make the most and the best of your lot, and compare yourself, not with the few, but with the multitudes that are below you. . . ." (Here further omission.) "Go steadily forward with lawful business or honest diversion. . . ." (Again an omission.) "This may seem but an ill return for your tenderness, but I mean it well, for I love you with great ardour and sincerity." No matter what were in the omitted passages, the sweetness and eager wish to soothe his friend ought to have atoned for all. But in those passages there must have been rough and particular warnings—references, probably, to Bozzy's dominating vices, which the Doctor believed were gaining on him. They could not have been admonitions of the same class as those given; otherwise Boswell would have let them remain. They were things he did not wish the public to know.

Now comes the wonder and surprise—it may be the shame. Instead of being softened, and falling, as it were, on his old friend's neck, he was stung into frantic hostility, and from that moment utterly broke off with him, and turned away from one who was virtually a dying man! All

the Doctor's gentle, persuasive entreaties seemed to add only fresh offence. Boswell dropped all communication, would answer no letters, and, obstinate in his purpose to the last, let his once dear friend go through his death-bed sufferings and pass away without being beside him. He flung his old patron away from him with all the marks of dislike and resentment. It seems as shocking as it is unaccountable.

Later, Boswell himself felt bound to offer some clumsy and rather disingenuous excuses for his conduct. It is the strangest, most memorable of human documents: "I unfortunately was so much *indisposed* during a considerable part of the year, that it was not, *or, at least, I thought it was not*, in my power to write to my illustrious friend as formerly, or *without expressing such complaints as offended him*. Having conjured him not to do me the injustice of charging me with affectation, I was with much regret long silent. His last letter to me then came, and affected me very tenderly."

"Indisposed" during a considerable part of the year! But Bozzy had been enjoying himself in town, attending dinner-parties up to July. We hear nothing of his sickness. "Indisposed" may therefore have been a gentle term for Bozzy's having "gone on the drink," and then, as a consequence, sunk into the dejection and miseries that border on *delirium tremens*. "Indisposed" would

be the toper's description of his state. It was only some madness of this kind that could prompt him to treat his old friend so; for does it not seem madness to confess openly—and very candidly, too—that it was *not in his power to write* to him on the old terms: as though some gross affront had been offered? This was surely a delusion, confirmed by a significant qualification, “at least, I thought it was not.” He confessed that he was perfectly *helpless* to refrain from expressing such complaints as offended Johnson. Poor Johnson, his diseases fast gathering upon him, wondered and was grieved at the long silence. One month before his death he made another tender appeal, telling him that he was failing, had lost ground:

“My legs are extremely weak, and my breath very short, and the water is now increasing upon me. In this uncomfortable state your letters used to relieve. What is the reason that I have them no longer? Are you sick, or are you sullen? Whatever be the reason, if it be less than necessity, drive it away; and of the short life that we have, make the best use for yourself and for your friends. . . . I am sometimes afraid that your omission to write has some real cause, and shall be glad to know that you are not sick, and that nothing ill has befallen dear Mrs. Boswell or any of your family.”

Again, who could resist? or how hard-hearted

must have been the man who did! But hear the much-injured Boswell still brooding on his wrongs :

“ Yet it was not a little painful to me to find that, in a paragraph of this letter which I have omitted, he still persevered in *arraigning me as before*, which was strange in him who had so much experience of what I suffered. I, however, wrote to him *two as kind letters as I could*; the last of which came too late to be read by him, for his illness increased more rapidly upon him than I had apprehended; but I had the consolation of being informed that he spoke of me on his death-bed with affection, and I look forward with humble hope of renewing our friendship in a better world.”

It is remarkable that these resentful lines, at whatever time they were written, were before Boswell some seven years later, when on the eve of issuing his volumes. Time therefore had not softened or abated his sense of grievance. He was compelled indeed, as we shall see, to make out some justification for his desertion of his friend, and had to maintain that he had been treated badly. He was in a most awkward situation, for he practically admitted that his state of hypochondria, however produced, had reduced him to a state of nervous helplessness in which he was too weak to carry out his own wishes; so he was compelled, as it were, to show that he had been treated tyrannically by his friend.

Can it be that at this supreme moment, when the good old Doctor was about to shuffle off his mortal coil, and thus finally dissolve their connection, it came back upon Boswell, in his fuddled, bemused state, how much tyranny and insult he had borne from him? There he was now, lying helpless and useless; the end was come; he could insult no more and be of no more assistance to him. After exploring the quarrel in all its bearings, I can find no plausible solution but one that is unfavourable to Bozzy—viz., that he cast his old friend off when he could do him neither good nor harm.

The most significant thing in this distressing episode is that little sentence, “I wrote to him two *as kind letters as I could*.” Heavens! the devoted, faithful Boswell, so exuberant in his devotion, flatteries, and flourishes, who cherished every scrap of his writing, to set down such a thing! For what does it import?—“I had to *force* myself to write kindly to him, I was so charged with resentment at his treatment of me. Only that I kept a careful guard, my feeling of wrong would have compelled me to say what I should have regretted.” I can hardly bring myself to leave this remarkable and unexpected utterance; it seems to convey so much, and that much so significant. Here Bozzy is so disordered as to think that he is making some great concession. Forced himself to write kindly!

By an odd chance, we find this very incident almost literally repeated some eight years before, when Johnson wrote him an angry reproof for his "black-dog" fits—a letter in which Boswell has suppressed passages which he had reasons for not wishing the public to see—and, as on the occasion of his later quarrel, Boswell was hurt: "what I could not help thinking strangely unreasonable in him, who had suffered so much from it himself, with a good deal of severity and reproof, as if it were owing to my own fault or that I was perhaps affecting it from a desire of distinction." Here were almost the very words of the later incident, and I have no doubt that he wrote them down as throwing light on it. It is curious that on this occasion also, a few days later, Johnson repented him of his severity, and sent an apologetic letter saying that he was more to be pitied than reproached.

Bozzy was offended. For this letter also had a paragraph or two of reproof, which he felt compelled to omit. From a previous letter he made omissions of the same kind, marking the place with stars. These, he says, referred to his indulgence in the glooms. Why omit them? In many a letter Johnson had roundly abused him for the same weakness, and no omission was made. It may reasonably be inferred that Johnson had spoken roughly of his degrading failing.

Bozzy's description really suits that of some unfortunate who is struggling with his craving and suffering from its effects. Johnson, with all his severe ailments, was courageously travelling about, visiting Birmingham and Oxford and other places. But no Boswell was attending him or writing to him. What followed was clearly the fruit of drink dementia. "Having *conjured* him not to do me the *injustice* of charging me with affectation, I was with regret long silent." A piece of strained exaggeration that made a mountain of a molehill, and looked at things through a cloud which nothing could dissipate. He says he was tenderly affected when Johnson wrote him a last letter of remonstrance, asking was he sick or sullen? But even some years after the event Boswell was looking at the incident through the same mists, and still complains of his arraigning him as before.

One's own ordinary experience is often found a useful guide in judging such matters. The late John Forster, Dickens's biographer, had "taken up" Browning when he was a young man, and beginning the world: and for some twenty years and more a fast "eternal" friendship was maintained between them. How often have I heard Forster apologize, as it were, for not inviting me to a dinner!—"My dear friend, it is impossible. Sunday has ever been sacred to Browning and to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, when we talk of the old and happy

days." This went on for some years more, when I was asked: "Did you hear of the quarrel between Forster and Browning?" At a dinner Forster began to scoff at a certain titled dame, whom Browning warmly "stood up" for. To the astonishment of all, some very angry remarks were interchanged, when Forster said something very offensive about the lady; on which Browning seized a decanter and threatened, "If you say another word about that lady, I will hurl this at your head!" Friends of course interposed; in time there was a reconciliation dinner, where I was a guest; but before it was over the strife had nearly broken out again, owing to a rather sneering remark of Forster's. I saw Browning with a great effort try to remain silent. After that they continued apart. Browning, explaining the matter to his friends, would say: "I was tired of his *always wiping his shoes on me.*" An expressive phrase! They had travelled over each other's minds again and again, and likely enough were heartily *bored* with one another. And so the matter came to a head. These violent delights have often violent endings.

Boswell's obstinate and truly unmeaning abstinence from attending Johnson in his illness or when dying was positively unfeeling when we think of the long and closely intimate terms on which they had been. He who had so pertinaciously clung to his leader, in order to secure an accurate record of

every important incident, now recklessly shut his eyes to the inconsistency, and was content to let the most important and most dramatic scene pass away unrecorded. What matter? He was totally indifferent. Others might collect the details if they chose. It was no longer his business. But what a picture have we lost! And think of this! Boswell, who would come to town on any pretext, now would not attend his friend's burial, though a "state" one in the Abbey!

Thus, almost as soon as the breath had gone from Johnson's brave old body, Bozzy found a serious blank left in his records which could not be filled, and he was obliged to have recourse to somewhat pitiful devices. In a rather shamefaced fashion he puts forth a sort of awkward *apologia* :

"It is not my intention to give a *very minute detail* of the particulars of Johnson's remaining days, of whom it was now evident that the crisis was fast approaching when he must '*die like men, and fall like one of the princes.*' Yet it will be instructive, as well as gratifying to the curiosity of my readers, to record *a few circumstances*, on the authenticity of which they may perfectly rely, as I have been at the utmost pains to obtain an accurate account of his last illness from the best authority."

This is quite amusing—"a very minute detail"! He would have been delighted to furnish it had he had the means, but by his own act he had put it

out of his power. He seems to say that such a full account was not unbecoming or unusual, and as a concession to the "curiosity" of his readers he had picked up all the details he could. He would "gratify his readers" with a few circumstances. He accordingly diligently sought and obtained from friends—the doctors, the clergymen, and others—quite an abundance of details, and also seems to have sent "Brother David" to pick up for him what matter he could. In this odd fashion he insinuates that the business was not important enough for his own service, so he entrusted it to others. All the time he was only anxious merely to gratify the curiosity of his readers. A good illustration of Bozzy's tortuous ways.

This was, as it were, the first act of the sad business which closed with the death of Johnson—and Johnson unreconciled! The second was to bring Boswell a great public mortification.

After writing his late friend "two as kind letters as he could" (one of which only arrived after the death), Boswell says that he learned that the dying man had spoken of him with affection—a great consolation, he said. He could now at least think of him without resentment. In his will there would probably be some touching recognition of his long and faithful service. The cloud would have passed away.

No doubt everyone had the same thought, and

in the Club circle it must often have been speculated over: "Of course Boswell will be left everything, and the old man had a good deal to leave." Some visions of this kind, too, may have floated through Bozzy's own clouded brain. What must have been the general astonishment when it was learned that the whole had passed to the black servant! But to Bozzy what a shock! Not so much for the disappointment, but for the mortifying situation. What would people say or think? How could he explain it, for he would be pressed to explain?

Bozzy had a small, sensitive soul; anything that touched his vanity, or made him appear little, hurt him. His disinheriting, as it might be called, so marked, so publicly done, seemed to him a bitter affront. When the Doctor had spoken of him charitably and with kindness, I fancy he thought all was well. But when the will became known, and he was disinherited, the wound opened again. The sense of injustice recurred.

But now was to come a fresh mortification for poor Bozzy. Johnson had selected a number of books from his library, which he bequeathed to sixteen chosen friends. But among them we find no Boswell! What! not even an old book? His name was, indeed, not even mentioned. Hawkins had a prominent share in the last scene. He persuaded Johnson to make a will; he prepared it; got his friend spiritual aid; suggested executors,

etc. The mortified Bozzy takes care not to mention these things, though he states that the Knight was caught in the act of attempting to *steal* some of the Doctor's papers!

No one can believe for a moment that Johnson wished to punish him by this exclusion. No, he wished to act according to strict justice—not to punish, but, still, not to reward or distinguish by a favour. He did not reflect what a sad public mortification he was inflicting on his friend. But he could not bring himself to pretend a regard he did not feel, and his sense of justice, as well as of truth, would not allow him to confer a testimonial on one who had treated him badly and ungratefully, though he had forgiven. I think this is the true explanation, and an answer to Bozzy's rather quibbling assertion, that other friends had met with the same exclusion. For these he had full regard, but not overflowing affection. This Bozzy had lost for ever.

How his enemies would wonder, and perhaps enjoy his public mortification! For if anything was notorious, it was the extraordinary and exceptional connection of the pair. Boswell was desperately put to it to make out a case. Still, he must say something. Why, for instance, was he not left an old book, even, like the sixteen others? He felt this so acutely that he was foolish enough to defend himself publicly, and entered on an elaborate

argument to prove that there were also others passed over like himself, who had received no old book. "It has been objected," he oddly says, "that Johnson omitted many of his best friends," etc. By "objected" we may suppose he means "has been urged," though it is likely enough that the "objection" came solely from Mr. Boswell. He names Dr. Adams, Dr. Taylor, Dr. Burney, Mr. Hector, Mr. Murphy, "the author of this work," and others. Only two of these could be called "best friends"—Dr. Taylor and Hector; yet for Taylor it was obvious that Johnson never had much real affection. Murphy was only an acquaintance, as was Dr. Burney. Hector certainly ought to have had a pecuniary legacy. Boswell knew well, at the time the will was made, that the true reason for his exclusion was that he had completely broken off all relations with his former friend, and that Johnson did not feel called upon to give him any public token of regard. With some little malice, he calls attention to the fact that Lucy Porter, his step-daughter, received nothing, and was "much displeased, rejecting a ring which the negro had offered her." And he rather needlessly states that "she ought to have considered that she had left nothing to Johnson by her will, which was made during his lifetime, as appeared at her decease." He thus took the trouble to give convincing proof of what he affirmed. His point was that, if he were treated

badly, others also were so treated. Altogether, it makes a sad and rather humiliating episode. Adams, too, was not a "best friend," for he saw but little of him—only on a rare visit to Oxford. But "the author of this work" ought not, surely, to be placed in such a category, for he was the "best of all best friends," his intimate companion, guide, and worshipper. But then comes the weakest reason offered for the exclusion: Johnson was near his end, so he could not compose himself to think and deliberately select—"he probably mentioned *such names as happened to occur to him.*" Anyone who reads the list of the sixteen recipients will see that they were carefully selected, and he had Hawkins beside him to assist his memory. But, again, urges Bozzy, "he may have recollected that he had formerly shown others such proofs of his regard that it was *not necessary to crowd his will with their names.*"* This was mere special pleading; of course he included himself in this category.

* I was one night attending a pleasant Johnson supper at Lichfield with the late Dr. Garnett, when I chanced to start the subject of this testamentary treatment of Boswell, which Dr. Garnett treated in the opposite sense. Could it not be, he urged, that the Doctor, by allowing himself to be reported so fully, and by, as it were, enduring his Bozzy for so many years, had really left him what he knew would turn out to be a substantial fortune in the shape of his own collected utterances? There was a half-ironical, half-humorous glance as the Doctor suggested this view, as though he did not entirely accept it.

But, surely, so pre-eminent was Boswell's claim on his remembrance that he stood above all, and in his case to be so marked and tabooed became a positive stigma. Sagacious judges must at once have seen—so marked was the exclusion—that nothing short of a quarrel could account for it.

The will* was a deliberate and carefully-drawn paper that had taken much time and much care to write. In it were some thirty beneficiaries, of all sorts and classes—money left to some, souvenirs to others—but no mention whatever of the faithful follower. So it is clear that the exclusion was of set purpose.

Boswell's curious commentary has always seemed to me to be most characteristic, from the *aigre* tone and the almost open confession that he was dealing with a matter that was painful and disagreeable to him, but too serious to be passed over. For everyone mentioned he has a stroke of some sort. It must be said that Boswell was disingenuously striving to throw dust in the eyes of friends and readers.

As to his will some reflections will occur. It was a strange one for a professedly religious man. There is not a line referring to the poor or to charitable objects. Instead, practically the whole was given to a negro servant, a person of no very

* One recalls Stiggins's anxious inquiries of Sam as to Mrs. Weller's will.

particular merit. From the testator's rather trivial boast that Francis should be *nobilissimus*—that is, that people should admire and wonder at his good-fortune and Johnson's liberality—there would seem to be a slight touch of vanity here, as who should say, See how magnificently a great man can provide for a great man's servant. No scruple seems to have disturbed him. He provided, however, for some old debt by way of restitution. However, these are but specks upon the sun. And here also we may ask ourselves, Was it quite becoming in so great a sage and moralist to take note of offence in this rather petty fashion? Would not a great soul disdain to mark his displeasure by such an act as withholding an old book? But I think, on the whole, the act only justifies his sturdy nobility of soul. He looked on the gift of these souvenirs, which were practically valueless,* as conscientious testimonials, and he could not bring himself to present one to a person whose conduct he disapproved of.

When we think of Bozzy's *servitude*, twenty years long, his assiduous, never-failing attendance, his usefulness, his patience, his good-nature, his kind thoughtfulness, shall we not incline to say

* I have had in my possession a folio "Twiss's 'Travels,'" *ex dono auctoris*, once belonging to Johnson, and with his autograph. I have given this book, which is also mentioned with favour by the Doctor in the Life, to the Johnson Library at Lichfield.

that he had a most serious claim on his friend's bounty? It was he, not the negro, who should have been *nobilissimus*. Poor Bozzy was literally *criblé de dettes*—"hard up," as it is called—and no one would have been surprised had his name figured for £1,000 or so. Johnson knew of his difficulties, and might have relieved them. Can it be that here was a further reason for Boswell's resentment—that it had leaked out that Johnson had resolved to leave all to the favoured black?

The idea of the "grand old Samuel," as Thackeray calls him, giving up his soul without the faithful henchman hovering round or kneeling to receive his last benison must have seemed to the Society an incredible, unthinkable thing. The progress of Johnson's disease, or rather diseases, was known everywhere, but as the fatal hour came closer and closer Mr. Boswell did not fly to town to be in time, but was content to rest in his torpor at Auchinleck.

It is sad to think, and it is beyond dispute, that Johnson with his faithful Boswell should both have died before their time—one from indulgence in the good things of the table, the other from a too sottish indulgence in drink. In the great Doctor's case it was truly a deplorable business. But it has been condoned. All know his greedy methods of taking his food, his gorging it, as it were, till the veins in his face swelled. He would not even

speak while he was thus engrossed. How are we to account for this weakness in so great a man, one who so carefully searched his conscience? The first avenging stroke came in the night. But after the friendly and gratuitous doctors had brought him round with cantharides, etc., our Sage, neglecting the warning, could not resist invitations to dinner-parties, and, amazing to relate, “gorged” away as before. According to medical prognostics, it is certain that he would have had another stroke within a few months which would have despatched him; but his other diseases—dropsy, asthma, affections of the kidneys and liver—were fatally increased by self-indulgence; while Boswell, deprived of his chief restraint, became more and more addicted to the bottle, even falling in the street and injuring himself. This sad, undignified fate of two such notable men, both presumed to be of pious life and pious feelings, is little known, or at least little thought of.

CHAPTER IX

EIGHTH MOTOR FORCE—JOHNSON ASSAILED

THIS strange, unexpected heading is likely to make the reader start. Johnson assailed, slandered, by his old friend! It had, then, come to this. He had taken offence passively—that is, had withdrawn into himself, had put aside all approaches, and silently nourished his resentment. But now, seven years later, he was to go further—to speak out and actually *libel* his old friend!

Boswell had the hostile memory of his grievances before him in 1790-91, when he was getting ready to publish. “Poor old Johnson!” he might have said, “I was too touchy, and was unkind to him, and need say nothing of our falling out.” Seven years had elapsed. It was an old story now, and his more tender feelings might have been roused. But then, how explain his *own* neglect and abandonment of the great man—how, unless by showing that Johnson was the aggressor and had treated him badly? During those years the offence, whatever it was, had rankled. He had brooded over it. What he wrote was not written

at the time, since when it might have faded out and have been forgotten. No, he was at the close of his labours, and on the eve of publishing; his wrongs rose up before him; now he could vindicate himself, set himself right with the public, and show that Johnson had treated him unjustly. He would tell the whole story in the face of the world. And this led him to a most extraordinary and unbecoming explosion of feeling, which really shocks.

When he came to write down particulars of the death scene, he ushered it in with a solemn, all but touching eloquence. "My readers," he says, "are now at last to behold SAMUEL JOHNSON" (in capitals) "preparing himself for that doom from which the most exalted powers afford no exemption to man." A fine, solemn prelude, fitting opening for an effective panegyric. We can fancy our author proceeding to moralize, with overflowing sympathy, over the sad details. But—oh, amazement!—we find the disciple interrupting himself of a sudden, and turning aside to make a sharp, bitter attack, ransacking the Sage's diaries and secret notes to find something out of his own mouth that shall criminate him. He maintained that Johnson's self-reproaches were really founded on the truth: he was repenting him of old sins, long concealed under the guise of neglects or omissions, but which he (Boswell), studying between the lines, could set

in their true light as *real* heinous sins of debauchery. How wonderful, how monstrous, is this, how unexpected! What did it mean? What is to be thought of this cruel mixture of attack and insinuation introduced at the very moment when he was about to give us the sad story of his great friend's departure from life? These confessions referred to lapses from virtue in early youth, when he first "came up to town." Boswell had, as he fancied, much to forgive; but he had not forgiven, though years had passed. It is clear to me that he could not forget the mortification he had suffered from the testamentary affront the Doctor had put upon him. The whole episode had, indeed, brought him a sort of discredit. He seemed to have lost caste. He must now tell his part of his story, and justify himself. He was led, I fancy, scarcely conscious of the disloyalty of his act, to raise the veil on Johnson's early life, and, with no *à propos* whatever, drag in an unseemly charge of loose habits, etc. This he feebly justifies on the pretext of duly "levelling down" the Sage to a lowest moral standard, with a view of justifying his own lapses by high example, and also to show that the great preacher and moralist was not so good as he claimed to be. It will be seen that the ashes of the old resentment were still "alive." In no other way can we account for this wanton attack.

The fashion in which Boswell ventured on this

perilous course takes shape as one of the most artfully deprecatory bits of defamation that can be conceived. He begins by making a charge against Sir John Hawkins of insinuating in a "strange dark manner" that Johnson had led a disorderly life in his youth, which, he says, would "give occasion to injurious suspicions, as if there had been something of more than ordinary criminality." There was nothing "strange" or "dark." The Knight merely said that Johnson had not lived up to all his teachings and theories, and that he dreaded to meet his Saviour—in short, what any dying Christian would say. What should we expect to follow?—A refutation by Bozzy, surely, or a defence of his friend. Nothing of the kind! "On that account, therefore, as well as *from the regard to truth* which he inculcated, I am to mention (with all possible respect and delicacy, however) that his conduct . . . was not strictly virtuous. . . . It was well known that his amorous inclinations," etc. But what will be said when it is found that this statement was a pure invention? The whole matter, in fact, is a bewildering delusion of Boswell's, whose poor brain must have been clouded by fumes at the moment.

And "Here," says his friend solemnly, "let the profane and licentious pause; let them not thoughtlessly say that Johnson was a *hypocrite*, or that his *principles* were not firm, *because his practice was not*

uniformly conformable to what he professed. . . . Is a prodigal a hypocrite when he owns his extravagance will bring him to ruin and misery? We are *sure* he *believes* it, but *immediate inclination*, strengthened by indulgence, prevails over that belief in influencing his conduct. Why, then, shall credit be refused to the *sincerity* of those who acknowledge their persuasion of moral and religious duty, yet sometimes fail of living as it requires?"

What an amazing suggestion is here!—Johnson was *not* a pharisaical hypocrite; but he *did* compound for indulgence in sin by doing good and righteous things—a favourite theory of Boswell's own. Poor Johnson thus comes from the hands of his defender as damaged as he could be. But Mr. Boswell adds complacently: "I am conscious that this is the most difficult and dangerous part of my biographical work, and I cannot but be very anxious concerning it. I trust that I have got through it, preserving at once my regard to truth, to my friend, and to the interests of virtue and religion."

Croker, writing to Lord Brougham, says there is not the least evidence that Johnson lived laxly. He fancied that Boswell had heard these things from Beauclerk, a man of loose life himself (such men delight in making others out as bad as themselves): "When I began my Johnsonian inquiries, I consulted many who had known Bozzy, on this

very point, and they explained it as one of Bozzy's crazy tricks, introduced to sanction his own."

It is clearly a defence of his own manner of life, and thus supplies yet one more proof of our thesis—that Boswell's "Life" was all through the life of himself—and a *tu quoque* vindication. It is as who should say: "Don't point the finger at me. If my course has been lax, what do you say now to our great moralist?" The fact was that Boswell was all the time, as it were, covering himself behind Johnson, enforcing his favourite and most convenient doctrine, that evil practice was quite consistent with pious principle. But however this may be, this strange man introduces us to his account of the dying Johnson by telling us that he had much guilt to repent of. The much-vilified Hawkins was infinitely more equitable when he spoke in a "strange dark manner" of Johnson's frailty, simply because he knew nothing certain about the matter.

Having launched the slander, our author in his own odd way tries to minimize: "It is of essential consequence to keep in view that there was in this excellent man's conduct *no false principle of commutation, no deliberate indulgence in sin, in consideration of a counterbalance of duty.* His offending and his repenting were distinct and separate; and when we consider his almost unexampled attention to truth, his inflexible integrity, his constant piety,

who will dare to 'cast a stone at him'? Besides, let it never be forgotten that he cannot be charged with any offence indicating badness of *heart*, anything dishonest, base, or malignant; but that, on the contrary, he was charitable in an extraordinary degree." An odd *plaidoyer*, almost suggesting the very contrary of what he was urging.

This painful incident therefore proves that seven years after Johnson's death his former friend had not forgotten or forgiven. But the whole was neither more nor less than *a libel*, being founded on an eccentric proceeding of the Sage's—his bringing a cyprian or two to a tavern to hear their story or counsel them—or his charitable act of carrying on his back to his rooms, where he tended her, one whom he found ill or dying in the street.

It may be added that Sir Walter Scott, who lived in Boswell's time and city, and knew a good deal about him, put these tales aside, taking the view I have taken, that Bozzy deluded himself into these calumnies as a justification of his own errors. The opinion of so wonderful a judge of character as Scott has a value all but judicial, especially in the case of a fellow-countryman. He was inclined to think there was a touch of insanity in Boswell's proceedings. And it comes in aid of the theory I am setting forth here, of Bozzy's interposing himself between the world and Johnson, that Scott thought of him "as the jackanapes on the bear's back ;

he could contrive to play his leader tricks, by getting him into awkward situations to see how he would look.”*

The ideally satisfactory edition of “Boswell’s Johnson” is still waited for. The principles of editing have yet to be discovered and applied by some man of genius of the Macaulay pattern; the mere navvies and hodmen and searchers in encyclopædias and magazines have so far done but little. The most useful and legitimate specimens we have are Malone’s editions, prepared with wonderful reserve—which it is almost comic to put beside the Birkbeck Hill overgrown cyclopædia (for such it is). Malone’s should be the pattern.

Mr. Croker—a man of great ability, though an eccentric writer—was a fairly sound commentator. Those who succeeded him fell into corrupt, unscientific methods, the chiefest of which was explaining allusions and illustrating the text in-

* One of the most lamentable things, which every true Boswellian must lament “to his dying day,” is the loss of Scott’s contribution to Boswell’s history. It is odd that they never met, though at one time both were living in the same city. Sir Walter good-naturedly furnished Mr. Croker with some valuable notes, recollections, etc., particularly of the old Auchinleck; but he also promised to supply a commentary on the proof-sheets, which were duly sent to him, and which he enriched with notes of value, as they suggested so much to his memory. Unhappily, these were lost in the post—a most serious calamity.

sanelly by a "superfœtation" of parallel passages. Croker pointed out that Boswell's *mind* ought to be the true object of study. The relation between his character and that of Johnson ought to offer a curious field of inquiry, and one of overpowering interest. The result of the system which Dr. Birkbeck Hill carried out so thoroughly was to concentrate all attention on the mere dryasdust aspects of the book, instead of treating it as a rare study of character.

Anyone seeking a few hours' genuine entertainment will find it in Dr. Birkbeck Hill's learned and most diligent lucubrations. Some of the touches are infinitely diverting. As is well known, the Doctor's ideal of Boswellian editing was to go about with a barrow, pick up every derelict "parallel passage" that could be found, and shovel it into his notes. Who will forget the ludicrous sketch drawn by himself of all his painful labours?—how often as he lay awake of nights, or when just "dropping off," of a sudden there flashed on him another "parallel passage!" Oh, joy! In an instant he was up and at his desk: the lamp was lit, and down went the "parallel passage," secured beyond escape, while the poor partner of his joys and sorrows strove to recapture her murdered sleep.

Here was one of the most extraordinary delusions that ever entered a commentator's soul. It developed and grew until it became morbid, and

the commentary swallowed up the text altogether. The extent to which he carried his hobby, or, rather, to which it carried him, is inconceivable. Once Johnson alluded in a letter to Hockley-in-the-Hole—a low resort; whereupon Dr. Birkbeck Hill laboriously collected and quoted no fewer than twenty passages from various writers in which the place was simply alluded to.

Commentaries on Boswell's great biography seem in these latter days to have an extraordinary fascination. Numbers of writers are constantly exercising their wits on the more perplexing passages, searching out the various "mysteries" involved—with more or less success. I can recall that cultured and deeply-read critic, the late Rev. Whitwell Elwin, one of the most amiable of scholars, saying to me that "he could imagine no more delightful duty than that of editing Boswell." Croker is so valuable because he gathered up all the tradition, and actually talked with some who had known the Sage. Still, he distinguished himself by a whole series of what are familiarly called "mare's-nests," such as that Johnson was "out" in the "forty-five," and had to *hide in London*.*

I have devoted some large volumes to showing the abundant mistakes into which the two leading commentators on Boswell's great book have been

* See the author's work on "Boswell and Croker's Boswell," which has a full collection of these oddities.

beguiled by their enthusiasm. Yet with all this profuse, superabundant investigation, there are many important difficulties not cleared up and left obscure. Such is, for instance, Johnson's application for an increased pension on the ground of poverty. But there is a conspicuous instance of error—almost perversely insisted on—which I am tempted to deal with here, and put on record the true significance of a passage in Johnson's life which was strangely misunderstood by both Croker and Dr. Birkbeck Hill. This is the question: "How long did Johnson remain at Oxford?"

These editors maintain that he was there for little over a year. But it can be convincingly shown that the period was *three* years. Anyone who reads calmly Boswell's full and minute account of Johnson's stay must feel that it is an account of a prolonged stay. The high reputation that he enjoyed with the authorities, his extraordinary display of learning, could only have been secured during a period of years. The Heads must have felt a sort of pride in their gifted alumnus, and this may account for their indulgence to his irregular attendances while he, poor youth! was struggling to secure assistance. But the authoritative statement of Boswell, evidently founded on intimate knowledge, that the period was three years, will strike everyone, and is convincing.

With a sad lack of critical sagacity, these two

commentators have rashly ventured to impeach Boswell's accuracy, and I venture to say that after a consideration of a few moments the reader will agree that their contention is impossible to maintain, and should never have been raised. Mr. Croker found, from an examination of the buttery-books, that Johnson's name was not set down, so that he had no meals, and therefore had not resided at the college. Dr. Birkbeck Hill long after followed suit, and more elaborately tried to support this thesis. Now, in the first place, it will be seen to conviction that two persons who ought to know—to wit, Boswell and Hawkins—were in actual communication with Johnson, and had taken down from him particulars as to the "Lives" which both were writing. Boswell went constantly to Oxford with Johnson, and there he obtained from Dr. Adams, Johnson's tutor, all the facts that were necessary for his account of Johnson's stay at the place. Would not his necessary question to tutor and pupil be: "Sir, how long was your stay at Oxford?" Is it likely that he would set down as a mere guess the period that he gives? But how much more authoritatively speaks Sir John Hawkins, evidently primed from the fountain-head! Every word of his statement proves that he was in possession of official information. "The time of his continuance at Oxford is divisible into two periods: the first from October 31, 1728, to December 1729, when

he left the place, the reason whereof was a failure of pecuniary supplies from his father." But someone in the Cathedral, it is supposed, having furnished the cash, "he returned and made up the whole of his residence—about three years," though he had to leave without a degree. This rather humiliating aid he did not confide to Boswell. The statement is supported by another version, of his being employed to "shepherd" a young fellow named Corbett, whose father paid for Johnson, but whose aid was soon withdrawn. All which seems quite convincing, and brushes away the cobwebs about buttery-books, entries, etc.

The story of the Corbett aid was as follows: Mr. Andrew Corbett of Lichfield was sending his son to Pembroke, and thought that Johnson would be of use as a sort of "grinder." According to Sir John, the young man did not relish Johnson's teaching, and his father took him away after some months. Sir John states positively that all that Johnson, who was left in sore straits, could obtain from the father was *an agreement to pay for his commons*. This would account for the irregular entries, rather than no entries, in the books—the charges being put to Mr. Corbett's account.

But there is another proof equally convincing. What Johnson accomplished at college is admitted to have been something amazing. For a mere youth, he was a "dungeon of learning." His Latin trans-

lation, later published, was thought extraordinary. He made friends, he attracted attention as a wonderful young scholar. Now, it may be asked, is it likely that a young beginner could have accomplished all this *within thirteen months*? Nay, was it likely—and this is most important—that Johnson, after a residence of a few months, would have set up in later life as the proud son of his college, and taken the airs of a long-standing habitué? He would have disdained such a thing, for he would know that he had only just begun his course. And he knew, too, that there would be numbers to remind him, and the public especially, that he had no real connection with the University, and had been compelled to leave it.

But what completely oversets the buttry-book theory is the fact that after Johnson's presumed departure there are two or three entries in these books showing that Johnson had been supplied with something. He was therefore on the books; indeed, his name was always carried forward with the others, though no "commons" were set down to him. Does not this suggest that, owing to some compassionate treatment, he was allowed to "hold on" in an irregular way until some arrangement could be made, and he was all the time getting outside as cheaply as he could the little food he needed? It must be considered that the University or the college would not like to cut adrift so brilliant and

promising a youth, and would connive at irregularities. Another view is that he may have regularly taken his commons, which were charged to another. And so, on the whole, the large, broad view may be taken that Boswell and Hawkins knew by information the actual truth of what they were stating; whereas Croker and Birkbeck Hill could only speculate.

Again, the programme and course of Johnson's studies were quite incompatible with a short stay. He devoted himself to the classics, ethics, and theology, including a course of the Fathers. Sir John Hawkins had six folios of his filled with plans for his multifarious reading. Johnson's wonderful acquaintance with ancient tongues and modern could not have been gained in thirteen months, though it might have been gained in thirty-six.

It is remarkable, as a proof of Johnson's confidence in Hawkins, that he should have told him that when he left college he found his father a bankrupt. How likely that this would have suggested talk on his own hapless case, how he had been forced to leave, etc. !

CHAPTER X

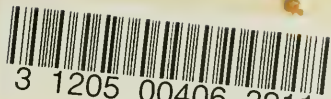
L'ENVOI

AT the close of this very minute investigation we might ask, What would be the impression left on the mind of an unsophisticated reader, one previously unfamiliar with the great book? He would surely exclaim: "Why, this is no Life of Johnson. It is all about Boswell—his thoughts, feelings, loves, dislikes, and adventures. Where does the Sage come in?" This prominence, in truth, overpowers everything else; and the same impression is surely left when one reads the original work itself. As I have said in the course of this discussion, it would not be difficult to collect a sort of biography of Boswell from the materials for the biography of Johnson. For this, indeed, as I have pointed out, though *called* a "Life of Dr. Johnson," is on the title carefully limited and cut down so as to admit of other departments, "comprehending," as he puts it, "a view of literature and literary men for nearly half a century during which he flourished."

But the whole case I have been putting forward does not rest upon the "Life" alone. It can be

shown that during his busy, restless life Boswell's exertions were directed to the one chief aim—that of advertising in every possible way his own sayings and movements. And if we go over the official list of his writings—the familiar letters to Andrew Erskine; the Tour in Corsica, “comprehending” his travels and conversations with Paoli and his various adventures; his political letters to the people of Scotland; the curious and odd papers on hypochondria, where he describes all his sufferings from that malady—we shall find that they mostly deal with matters connected with himself. In such magazines as *The London*, *The Scots*, and others in which he had secured a share of the proprietorship, he was thus enabled to insert almost anything that he pleased, and in these he issued, without restraint, all his angry controversies with ladies and others. Here also were reported, as if in a newspaper, all his movements.

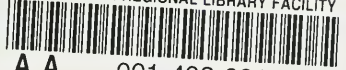
THE END



3 1205 00406 3911

AA

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 001 402 981

3

